

P401 (§ 11962)/P515 (§ 29794) Fall 2009

History of the Problem of Universals in the Middle Ages

Office Hours:

E-mail:

Title of the course: History of the Problem of Universals in the Middle Ages.

This course is a combined undergraduate/graduate course, being offered under two simultaneous numbers: P401 for the undergraduate version and P515 for the graduate version. The fact that we have two “instances” of what is in effect exactly the same course is perhaps an illustration of the very problem of universals that is the topic of this course. (I’ll say more about what that problem is in a moment.)

But it’s not really exactly the same course. I will be expecting an appropriately more ambitious term-papers and examination answers from those of you taking this course under the graduate number.

Handouts:

(1) Syllabus

Lectures: 2:30–3:45 PM Mondays & Wednesdays.

Format: Lecture with *some* questions.

Required Texts:

Paul Vincent Spade, *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals: Porphyry, Boethius, Abelard, Duns Scotus, Ockham*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994).

Paul Vincent Spade, *History of the Problem of Universals in the Middle Ages: Notes and Texts*. A packet of materials containing additional notes on the translations in *Five Texts*, together with some further translations. It comes to 191 pages, and is available from . (\$29.90 plus tax.)

Bring these first two items to class with you regularly; I will be frequently referring to particular passages in them.

Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, Armand Maurer, tr.

I'd like to call your attention to some things on the *Syllabus*. You can read the details there.

- (a) Oncourse site for this class: . When you log in, you will see two tabs across the top of your screen: one for either FA09 BL PHIL P401 11962 or FA09 BL PHIL P515 29794, depending on whether you're enrolled in this class under the undergraduate or the graduate number; and the other a tab for FA09 BL PHIL P401 C11662. The latter is the combined site I am using for this course, rather than having to duplicate everything. Everything will take place on this combined site. If you go to either of the other course sites, you will be redirected to this combined one.

On the Oncourse site, you will find:

- A copy of the *Syllabus*.
- Various announcements, posted as we go along.
- An email archive, where you can view messages from me or your classmates relevant to this course. You can send email to and it will be automatically forwarded to all members of this class and deposited in the email archive for later viewing. () Note that this feature is to be used only for matters relevant to this class. If you abuse it and start sending random emails to everybody, I'll have to reconfigure the utility so that only I can send mail through it.
- An "Assignments" utility, where you will submit your examinations and papers for this course in digital format.
- A quiz-taking utility, for weekly quizzes as described below. (Click on the "Original Test and Survey" link in the menubar on the left of your screen.)
- A "Post'Em" grade-reporting utility, where you can see your running grades for this course: quiz grades, examination grades, paper grades, comments, etc. (Note: I have to upload these grades manually from my Excel spreadsheet gradebook. So there will be some lag-time between, say, taking a quiz and seeing the results

posted here.) I am not using the Oncourse "Gradebook" utility, which I find too restrictive for my purposes.

- A "Resources" folder. Lots of important things will be deposited here. These will include information about books on reserve for us at the Wells Library, several articles and papers in PDF format, copies of all class handouts (including the Syllabus), and whatever other amazing and unpredictable things I come up with. Get familiar with the "Resources" folder.

- (b) Course requirements: Mid-term and final examinations and a term paper. Also: Series of eleven weekly 20-point quizzes, beginning next week. (We won't have done enough this week to be able to quiz you over anything.) These quizzes will be done through Oncourse. They will be available from 3:45 Wednesday afternoons (right after this class) until the following Sunday midnight (technically 0:00 a.m. the following morning). (See the *Syllabus* for details.) The idea here is (a) to prod people to keep up, (b) make sure you have all the facts and names and things in place before we start drawing connections, raising objections and getting too theoretical, and (c) to give both you and me some constant feedback.

Finally, I want to make one last preliminary remark about the nuts and bolts of this class. All written work for this class will be submitted online. The quizzes I've already told you about; they are handled through the Oncourse quiz utility. The mid-term, the term paper, and the final examination, will all be submitted through the "Assignments" utility on Oncourse.

- (2) Reserves. This is not a reading-list of stuff you are expected to master for this course, although it would be terrific if you did. Rather the idea is that these are mostly things that may be relevant to writing your term papers. A few of them are things we will be actively discussing in class.

First Reading Assignment (For Next week):

This is not as much as it sounds like.

From the *Five Texts*:

Porphyry the Phoenician, *Isagoge*, together with the corresponding further notes in the *Notes and Texts*.

Boethius, together with the corresponding further notes in the *Notes and Texts* (there's only one further note in this case).

Then, in “Part Two” of *Notes and Texts*, where you get further translations, please read the additional material from Porphyry and Boethius. That is:

Porphyry the Phoenician, From his *Exposition of Aristotle's Categories by Question and Answer*.

Boethius, From his *Second Commentary on Porphyry's Isagoge*, III.11. (This is the same work as, but a different passage from, the Boethius text in *Five Texts*.)

Boethius, From his *Second Commentary on Aristotle's De interpretatione*, II.7.

Boethius, *Two Texts from his Theological Tractates*.

This is not a lot of reading, some 44 or 45 pages in all. We will be spending considerable time on these texts, but we will begin talking about them fairly soon. The main ones are: Porphyry's *Isagoge*, the passage from Boethius in *Five Texts*, and the passages from the *Theological Tractates*. I will be using the other texts simply to illustrate particular points I want to make along the way. Pay particular attention to the Boethius passage in *Five Texts*.

Don't be worried if you don't understand these texts the first time through. You soon will.

Optional (But Entertaining and Highly Recommended) Readings:

From “The Course in the Box,” Version 3.0 beta (explain):

Ch. 2: “Methodological Considerations.” (That is, “Why Study the History of Philosophy Anyway?”)

Perhaps Ch. 3: “The Greek Background to Mediaeval Philosophy, or Everything You Need to Know About the Greeks.” If you need to brush up on your Plotinus, for instance.

Ch. 22: “Boethius: Life and Works.” If you want to know who this Boethius fellow was that we'll be talking about. (I will say a little about that later on.)

What Is The Problem of Universals?

The first thing we need to do is to ask: What is the problem of universals anyway? In other words, what is this course going to be about?

We can ask this question in at least two forms:

- (1) If all we are asking for is some kind of *motivation* for the problem of universals, something to get the discussion going, then that is fairly easy, and I will try to do that in a moment.
- (2) But if we are asking for a *precise* statement of the problem of universals — or of the *problems* of universals, since after all there is a whole cluster of relevant philosophical problems here — then that is a much harder task, and something you have to work into slowly. This is something we will get into gradually throughout the semester.

But let's start with what I said was the easy part, the *motivation* for the problem of universals — a kind of quick and easy statement of it.

Consider these two pieces of chalk. They come from the same manufacturer and — apart from their different lengths — are in most respects pretty much alike. In particular, they are of the same color: they are both white.

Now I want you to look at these two pieces of chalk, and for the moment to ignore everything else about them, and to focus only on their color.

How many colors do you see here? How many whitenesses? One or two?

If you reflect a bit, I think you will see that, at an initial, pre-philosophical level, *either* answer is plausible. (And I will want to maintain in this course that, even at a fairly sophisticated, philosophical level, the correct choice is not clear.)

Now don't interrupt with objections — not yet. I'm about to give you some arguments you may think are fallacious and silly — on *either* side of the question. That doesn't matter for now. I'm simply trying to set up the situation for future discussion. It is my contention that although it is of course possible to *state* these arguments in silly and fallacious ways, in fact they're much more serious arguments than they may appear at first.

First side: For example, you might say that there is only *one* color, *one* whiteness here. After all, didn't I just say that the two pieces of chalk were of the same color? You only have to *look* at these two pieces of chalk to see that this is the case. Here it is, this particular shade of whiteness, once over here, and there it is again — the same whiteness — over there.

There is only *one* color here, one whiteness, even though it is in two distinct things and in two distinct places at once.

If this is the answer you are inclined to give, then you believe in *universals* — or at least you believe in *one* universal, the one whiteness common to or shared by these two pieces of chalk. And, of course, if you are inclined to give similar answers to other, similar questions, then you believe in universals all the more. To that extent, you are said to be a realist with respect to the problem of universals.

The other side. On the other hand, let's do it again. Look once more at these same two pieces of chalk.

You might want to say instead that you do *not* see just one color in these two pieces of chalk. You see *two* colors, two whitenesses — one here, in this piece of chalk, and the other there, in that piece of chalk.

They look exactly alike, to be sure, but they are nevertheless *two* for all that. All you have to do is to *look* at them to see that this is so. Just *count* them! Here is the one whiteness, the whiteness of this piece of chalk, and there is *another* (exactly similar) whiteness, the whiteness of that piece of chalk.

If this is what you are inclined to say, and if you are inclined to say similar things in other such cases, then you do *not* believe in universals — or at least you don't believe the color of these two pieces of chalk is one. There is no one color shared by or common to these two pieces of chalk. The colors of the two pieces of chalk are just as distinct, although of course just as much alike, as the two pieces of chalk themselves are.

Insofar as you do *not* believe in universals in this way, you are said to be a nominalist. (The significance of this term — that is, what is “nominal” about “nominalism” — is a matter of considerable historical murkiness. Oddly enough, originally the term seems to have had nothing to do with the problem of universals at all.)

So — how many colors do you see: one or two? That, reduced to the bare essentials, is an example of the problem of universals. And the two *main* answers to it are realism and nominalism.

A “universal” then is a kind of common or shared entity, like the one color, the one whiteness, postulated by the “realist” response I just described. (Note that, despite the term, there is no suggestion that “universals” have to be shared by *absolutely everything*. Universals need not be “universal” in *that* sense. Nevertheless, they *are* supposed to be common to, or shared by, *several* things — more than one, anyway.)

In its most general form, therefore, the problem of universals can be put as follows:

Are there universals or are there not?

Realists say yes; nominalists say no.

As we shall see, there are all sorts of nuances I have left out here. But this will serve to get us started.

Now, with that as a preliminary statement of the problem of universals, let's turn to another problem:

Who cares? So what?

In other words, does the problem of universals have any real philosophical importance, or is it just a kind of cute question like “Is the glass half-full or half-empty?” — a question the answer to which may tell us something about your own personal psychology, the way you personally are inclined to view the world, but which really does not go beyond that?

In other words, what real philosophical importance is there to the problem of universals? What rests on it?

Well, I want to maintain that *a great deal* rests on it. Let me approach the matter gradually.

The case for Realism:

I suspect many of you are, initially at any rate, *realists* of one kind or another, or at least think you are.

I may be wrong about this, but if I am it doesn't matter. I am just easing into my topic here. Nevertheless, I don't think I *am* wrong. I suspect that many of you — particularly if you've had some philosophical training in what used to be called the “analytic” tradition — thought there was something implausible, not to say misguided, about the *nominalist* line I presented a moment ago when I was doing the little chalk-trick.

If so, then what I'm saying now is on your behalf. (The rest of you can listen in; I'll be addressing you in a moment.)

OK, you realists. Let me put words in your mouths. You might say, for example, that what the *nominalist* was calling the *two colors* — the two exactly similar whitenesses — of the two pieces of chalk, is *really* just two *instances* or *instantiations* of *one* color, *one* whiteness. In other words, the nominalist is counting the wrong things! He's counting the instances instead of the one universal thing they are all instances of.

(a) You might in fact suspect that I gave the game away a while ago, when I was presenting the nominalist point of view, by *admitting* that what I was then calling the two colors of these two pieces of chalk looked exactly alike.

How could I recognize that, you might ask — and now we get an actual *argument* for the first time (we've not had any arguments so far, but only the bald presentation of views) — how could I recognize that the two colors, or color-*instances*, or whatever you want to call them, looked exactly alike, unless they had something in common?

What basis could there be for their *looking alike*, for their looking *the same*, unless they really *are* the same? Otherwise, wouldn't their looking *the same*, or *looking alike*, be a distortion and falsification of the facts — *an illusion*?

(b) Let me make another pass over the same point, this time with a slightly different emphasis. If there is nothing really shared by or common to the two whitenesses of these two pieces of chalk, then it would seem that the fact that we spontaneously tend to group them together and *recognize* them as being both “white” would be utterly gratuitous, utterly unfounded, utterly groundless. It would be a matter of *arbitrary convention* — cultural conditioning perhaps, or something like that — but in no sense would it be a matter of hard, rock-bottom ontological fact.

(c) Let's make a third pass over the point, this time putting it more *generally*. When we know things, when we *think* of things intellectually (whether it counts as knowledge or not), we categorize them, we group them together with other things and call them by the same name. We call both these pieces of chalk “white.” For that matter, we call them both “chalk.” What right do we have to do that, unless there is some real basis for that grouping?

In short, if nominalism is correct, it seems that *all* of our so called knowledge that proceeds in terms of general concepts or general terms — and indeed all of our *thoughts* that proceed in such terms, whether we want to call them “knowledge” or not — are utterly arbitrary, in the sense that they proceed by grouping and categorizing things in ways that have no objective basis at all, but rather depend entirely on our own pragmatic purposes, our cultural or social conditioning, or other extraneous factors — but in no case on any objective *facts*.

In other words, nominalism appears to *destroy* any possibility of genuine human knowledge. That is, NOMINALISM ENTAILS SKEPTICISM. And skepticism of a very strong variety: not the skepticism that says merely that, while there probably *are* certain facts out there that we may or may not be thinking about correctly, we can never be *sure* we are thinking about them correctly. Rather, the much more radical skepticism that says that, for a huge majority of our thoughts, those that proceed in universal or general terms, there simply *is* no universal or general reality out there to correspond to them. (All that's left is such utterly *particular* bits of "knowledge" as: "*This, here, now!*")

It's not, then, that our thoughts may or may not be true, but we can never be sure which. Rather, we can be *dead sure* all such thoughts are *false*. False, that is, *if* truth is supposed to be a kind of correspondence with reality.

No doubt, this is why many more or less recent nominalists have abandoned a correspondence theory of truth and adopted a kind of pragmatic or coherence theory of truth instead. For example, Quine, or Nietzsche. Our general terms and concepts do not "cleave nature at the joints," as Plato put it. They rather reflect our own subjective, cultural or scientific purposes.

(d) In fact, we can perhaps argue the case against nominalism even more strongly — and this I suppose is a fourth pass over the realist case. Nominalism holds that our general concepts fail to correspond to general or universal realities. ALL our general concepts fail in this way, since there are no universals. ALL OF THEM DO.

You see, nominalism itself is a theory that is framed in general terms, and so is condemned by its own verdict.

Nominalism not only wrecks human knowledge — or divine knowledge, for that matter. It is also self-refuting. What stronger case could possibly be made against it?

I suspect, as I said, that this is the sort of reasoning many of you would find appealing, and perhaps even persuasive. In fact, I don't think the case is nearly so strong as I have made it sound — but that is something we will get into later in the course. For the present, let's just take the argument as it stands.

Notice one crucial thing about it:

IT PROCEEDS ENTIRELY IN EPISTEMOLOGICAL TERMS.

That is, the case *against* nominalism is entirely an epistemological case. Even the point about nominalism's being self-refuting is, if you think about it, an epistemological argument. The realist's argument here is not that there is anything incoherent about things' being the way nominalism says they are. The

incoherence is only in saying or thinking that things are the way nominalism says they are. (A little like the early Wittgenstein, and the business about trying to say “what cannot be said.”)

Here we have Spade’s First Great Law of the History of Philosophy:

NOMINALISM HAS PROBLEMS OVER KNOWLEDGE.

Not that the problems cannot be solved. Perhaps they can be. The point is rather that it is going to be in the area of epistemology that the problems arise. And if you are going to attack nominalism, you will almost inevitably attack it here.

This is a situation we will see verified time and time again throughout this semester. Keep your eyes open for it.

The Case for Nominalism:

But the story isn’t over yet. The nominalist has yet to have his say. Let’s look at his side for a while.

The nominalist might try to launch a counterattack, by pointing out that *realism*, after all, is not without problems of its own.

(a) You realists (let us speak in the nominalist’s voice for a moment), you realists are committed to postulating these spooky things you call “universals.” And they turn out to have the most marvelous and paradoxical properties. For instance, they can be in two places at once — as the one universal color “whiteness” was present simultaneously in the two distinct pieces of chalk.

(b) But worse than that. Your realist theory is committed to saying positively impossible things about universals. Universals, according to you realists, can be combined with contrary properties at the same time.

For instance, the universal nature animal (or animality) is combined with rationality in human beings, but with irrationality in cows (conspicuously in cows, in my judgment). But how can that be? How can the incompatible properties rationality and irrationality “come together” in the same animal nature at the same time? What does it mean to call them “incompatible” if not that they *can’t* “come together” like that?

(c) It is important to realize that it really is the same, one animal nature that is involved here. We are not talking about two animal natures, a human animal nature that is rational, and a bovine animal nature that is irrational. That would be

to give up the notion of one shared animal nature, and so to abandon realism here entirely.

No, it is the one universal nature that is both a rational animal nature and an irrational or non-rational animal nature — which is **a violation of the Law of Non-Contradiction** if I ever saw one. How much stronger a refutation of realism could be asked for?

(d) Neither will it do any good to say that the one animal nature is a rational animal nature only in human beings, and that it is an irrational or non-rational animal nature only in brute animals such as cows and other non-humans — as though the clauses ‘only in this’ and ‘only in that’ somehow saved the theory from contradiction. They don’t; they only distract you from the contradiction. They cannot save you from it so long as it is the one, same animal nature in both cases.

(e) It also won’t do any good to say that the objection is misguided, that it is not the animal nature that is rational or not. It is animals — humans and cows — that are rational or non-rational, respectively. In other words, it won’t do you any good to say that rationality and non-rationality are not things we say of the nature, but rather of the individuals that have that nature along with other properties as well, so that the contradictory properties do not belong to one and the same animal nature, but rather to several and distinct individual animals, and there is therefore no violation of the Law of Non-Contradiction after all.

That won’t work, I say. Such a dodge may indeed save you from violating the Law of Non-Contradiction. But, insofar as you have just committed yourself to saying that the one, *universal* animal nature is *neither* rational nor non-rational (it’s only individual animals that are rational or irrational), you have just **violated the Law of Excluded Middle**.

Let’s pause here. I don’t really care for now whether you *agree* completely with these arguments, or even whether you fully *understand* them at this point. That can come later.

For the present, just notice something about them. There is not one word about knowledge. These arguments, unlike those we saw a while ago against nominalism, are entirely *metaphysical* or *ontological* in nature. If nominalism traditionally runs into difficulties on epistemological matters, realism traditionally runs into problems over metaphysical or ontological matters.

Just as before, in the case of nominalism, I do not here mean to suggest that the problems are insuperable. Perhaps they can be resolved. But the fact is, it is *here* that the problems arise for realism. This, like the dual case for nominalism, is one of the great laws of the history of philosophy. It is Spade’s Second Great Law:

REALISM HAS PROBLEMS OVER METAPHYSICS.

Combining our results so far, here is the situation: Nominalism has difficulties traditionally over matters of epistemology, whereas realism has difficulties traditionally over matters of metaphysics. The choice between nominalism and realism is to some extent a question of preference: Where do you want your problems?

Nominalism has no special problem over metaphysics. Its metaphysics is clean and neat. The problem of nominalism is not how the world can be the way nominalism says it is. The problem is rather how we can know the world is the way nominalism says it is — how we can even think it or say it. The problems for nominalism are epistemological.

Realism, on the other hand, has no special problems with epistemology. (Or at least it has no problems over and above the problems any epistemological theory has; it has no special problems arising from realism.) If universals are really out there in reality, then they are there to be read off by the mind without any special ado. Realism has no special trouble saying how we know the way the world is. Its problem is rather in explaining how the world can be the way realism knows it is!

Let me emphasize once again: The difficulties are perhaps not so *absolute* as I have made them sound here.

But what I want you to get out of this *for now* is the line-ups.

In the great battle between realism and nominalism, the armies have historically always lined up this way — and still do so today, if you read the literature:

Metaphysics is on the side of nominalism; nominalism has the less problematic metaphysical view.

Epistemology is on the side of realism; realism has the less problematic epistemological time of it.

Now, of course, you shouldn't think this means that nominalists are going to be constantly talking about metaphysics (which is where their advantage lies) and realists about epistemology.

Sometimes it is just the other way around.

John Duns Scotus, for instance, a kind of realist at the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries, has a *great deal* to say about the metaphysical implications of his own realism.

And William of Ockham, who was a nominalist from the generation right after Scotus, discusses epistemological matters at great length.

What is going on here is that these people are being honest enough to face up squarely to the difficulties in their own theories, and try to answer them. They are not just dwelling on their advantages, but trying to overcome their disadvantages too.

In other words, this is not just a matter of scoring points against the opposition, of dwelling on your own advantages and your opponent's disadvantages. Philosophy is not a contest like that, at least not if you're serious about it. It's a matter of honestly trying to *get things right*, so you have to *deal* with the real problems your views present, and not just try to distract attention from them.

Scotus the realist has epistemology on his side. But he talks *a lot* about metaphysics because that's where the work has still to be done for him.

So too, Ockham the nominalist has metaphysics on his side. But he talks *a lot* about epistemological problems precisely because those *are* the problems for his theory.

This is enough for the present about the overall lay of the land. I want you to keep your eyes open and be sensitive to this line-up as we proceed through the semester.

Terminology

With that out of the way, let me turn now to our first substantive item of business — and that is *terminology*. I'm going to spend a little time on this now, at the beginning of the course, while you're reading Porphyry and Boethius. What I'll be saying here is somewhat miscellaneous. I just want to get you familiar with certain terms, notions and doctrines before we get down into the thick of it with Boethius.

One of the hardest things about reading medieval philosophy is the *technical vocabulary* that is unlike anything you may be familiar with.

Part of this is just a matter of knowing what the *words* mean, and part of it is a matter of seeing where these people are coming from. And of course all this is complicated by the fact that the words frequently *change* their meaning from author to author, and so do the presuppositions and starting points. So, it's a sticky business.

Nevertheless, we have to begin somewhere, and I am going to begin with Porphry the Phoenician, and his *Isagoge*.

You may not have read clear through the *Isagoge* yet, and I am not going to do a close and detailed analysis of the text — either now or later. But I do want to give you a kind of orientation.

First of all, who was Porphyry, and what is this book called the *Isagoge*?

Porphyry was a neo-Platonist, who was born at Tyre, in what is now southern Lebanon, about 232 AD. (Pass out handout “Where on Earth is Tyre?”) He moved to Rome in the 260s, where he spent the main part of his career. He died sometime early in the following century — i.e., in the early 4th century.

Porphyry was a pupil of Plotinus, the great third-century neo-Platonist. Porphyry is the one responsible for arranging Plotinus’s works into six groups of nine essays each — the so called *Enneads* (= the “nines”) — which is the form in which we have Plotinus’ work today.

He also wrote a famous *Life of Plotinus*, which is included in most editions and translations of Plotinus’s writings. It begins with the striking sentence:

Plotinus, our contemporary philosopher, seemed ashamed of being in the body.

Porphyry was a pagan philosopher, and wrote in Greek (even thou he worked in Rome). He was a severe critic of Christianity, and in fact wrote some *vitriolic* attacks that ridiculed Christianity.

He also wrote a number of purely philosophical works, including the one I am asking you to read in *Five Texts* — the so called *Isagoge*.

‘*Isagoge*’ is Greek for “introduction.” The Greek is εἰσαγωγή.

It ought properly to be transliterated ‘Eisagoge’, but almost never is when we are referring to the title of this book.

The *Isagoge* then is an “introduction.” In fact, it’s an introduction to Aristotle’s *Categories*.

In the *Categories*, as you may know, Aristotle distinguished ten ultimate *categories*, the ten basic kinds of things. They are (*Cat.* 4, 1^b25–27) (Pass out handout “Two Passages from Aristotle.”):

substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position (i.e., orientation), state, action, and affection (i.e., *passion*, being passive — the opposite of action).

There was a long-standing dispute in the commentary tradition over whether these ten categories were meant to be a classification of *things*, or a classification of the *terms* we use to describe things.

Porphyry certainly thought it was the latter, but that doesn't matter for now.

The Greek κατηγορία just means 'predicate', although obviously it has a special sense in Aristotle. In the Latin (although not in the Greek), there are two words to distinguish in this context. There is 'praedicatum', which just means predicate — *any* old predicate. And there is also 'praedicamentum', which means one of the ten *Aristotelian* categories in particular. Sometimes the latter term is translated "predicament" (pronounced "PREdicament," not "preDICament," which means something altogether different). If you see that word, it just means an Aristotelian category.

There is some other terminology too, which we'll talk about later.

Well, Porphyry's *Isagoge* is meant to be an introduction to Aristotle's *Categories*. He proceeds not by talking about the ten Aristotelian categories directly, but instead by discussing five *words* or notions that he says are important for a clear understanding of the *Categories*. These five notions are: genus, difference, species, property and accident.

They came to be known as the five "predicables" — praedicabilia, not to be confused with the predicaments, which are the ten Aristotelian categories.

Although there is considerable doubt about it, people sometimes say that Porphyry's list of five predicables is based on a similar list of four items that Aristotle presents in his *Topics* I.4 101^b23–25, and again in more detail in *Topics* I.5 101^b37–102^b26. There Aristotle discusses: definition, property, genus and accident.

Porphyry's list differs from Aristotle's by adding difference, which Aristotle doesn't have on his list, and by substituting species for definition. We'll see a little later why I say this would most likely be the way it went — if they're talking about the same things at all. But let's just ignore all that for the moment and move on.

The *Isagoge* then proceeds by discussing each of the five predicables in turn. It describes what each of them is, how each of them is to be defined, and then goes on to explain how each of the five is like, and how it is unlike, each of the other four.

And that is the book.

Now what is the importance of this work for us? Why am I asking you to read it in a course on the medieval problem of universals?

Well, the work turns out to be extremely important for the medieval history of this problem.

Like all of the other major philosophical works of this early period, it was written in Greek. Philosophy, as you recall, was after all a Greek invention. In the Roman, the Latin world, it was decidedly an import.

Now, in the early centuries of the Christian era, as the old pagan culture of the ancient world gradually declined, Greek died out in the Latin West. The general level of education declined, and you could no longer assume, as you can today (!), that any educated person would of course know Greek. Greek became a very specialized kind of knowledge, confined to a few scholars.

This of course meant that the Latin world was effectively cut off from the primary sources and works of its philosophical heritage in Greek. Plotinus was almost wholly lost — that is to say, it was unavailable in Latin — until the Renaissance. (Actually, that's not quite true. Some passages of Plotinus did circulate in Latin translation, only they weren't attributed to Plotinus but to Aristotle!) And the same was true for Plato. The *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, and perhaps some other scraps, were translated into Latin in the 12th century, but they were not very widely read or circulated. The first half of the *Timaeus* was translated at a fairly early date, and did enjoy a relatively wide readership — but that is all, until Lorenzo Valla in the Renaissance made all the rest of Plato available to the West in Latin translation. (That first half of the *Timaeus* will be immensely significant for our story, as we'll see in due course.)

The situation with Aristotle was more complicated. The bulk of Aristotle's writings were translated only in the late 12th and early-13th centuries, and this was an event of immense importance in the whole history of western philosophy.

But, even before that time, the Latin West had a few things of Aristotle. The translations were done in the early-sixth century by Boethius (c. 480–524/6). Boethius was a Roman noble, who had a very important official position in the Ostrogothic (that is to say, barbarian) government of Theodoric. Boethius did know Greek, and he also knew a great deal about the Greek philosophical heritage. He took it upon himself to translate all of Plato and all of Aristotle into Latin, and then to write a work showing how they really said the same thing in the end. (This was a kind of commonplace of the period: Truth is one, and so Plato and Aristotle were not ultimately irreconcilable; each supplemented the other.)

Well, Boethius did not live to complete this ambitious project. He was arrested for treason and executed somewhere between 524 and 526. But before he died, he did

succeed in translating at least three works: Aristotle's *Categories* and *De interpretatione*, and Porphyry's *Isagoge*. (He also seems to have translated most of the rest of Aristotle's logical works, but the other ones went out of circulation pretty quickly.) Boethius also wrote a number of other philosophical works of his own, based on these three Greek sources and on some of the Greek commentators. And he himself wrote several commentaries on these works, including two commentaries on the *Isagoge*, one based on an earlier translation by one Marius Victorinus (whom you may have met if you've read Augustine's *Confessions*), and the other — a much longer commentary — based on his own translation of Porphyry. I have asked you to read two passages from that second commentary on Porphyry, one in *Five Texts* and another in the *Notes and Texts*. The first of them, the one in *Five Texts*, is a crucial passage, and was an important step in the development of the medieval history of the problem of universals. In fact, it was the very first step.

You see, at the very beginning of his *Isagoge*, Porphyry mentioned three questions that he said he wasn't going to discuss in this work, since they would involve too detailed a study to be included in an introductory work such as the *Isagoge*. The three questions — which are found in the *Isagoge*, p. 1, § (2) in *Five Texts* — are all about the “ontological status” of the things Porphyry is talking about in this work, that is, of genus, difference, species, property and accident — the five so called predicables.

We'll look at these questions in more detail later on. For the present, we can say that these questions in effect raised the problem of universals in a fully explicit form. And they did so in one of the three and only three original works of Greek philosophy generally available to the Latin West before the mid-12th century (with the exception of the first part of Plato's *Timaeus*). But, of course, while Porphyry does raise these questions, he says he is not going to discuss them in his *Isagoge*.

Well, that is a perfect set-up. The stage couldn't have been better set for someone like Boethius to come along and to try to answer the questions Porphyry had declined to discuss. And that is exactly what happened.

And not only Boethius discussed the problem. As time went on, lots of other people did too. And they often did it in commentaries on this very text of Porphyry. Commentaries on Porphyry become a main place to look for discussions of the problem of universals throughout the Middle Ages. There were other discussions as well, of course. But if an author has a commentary on Porphyry, you should *always* look there for his view on the problem of universals.

Now, with that background, let's talk about some of the terminology and doctrine involved in Porphyry's *Isagoge*.

Perhaps the best way to get into it is via the notion of definition.

In present-day usage, the term 'definition' is used much more loosely and broadly than in the medieval usage. For us, a definition of something is pretty much any phrase or expression that allows us to identify or pick out that thing uniquely. And if what we are defining is some sort of general or common notion, then a definition is any phrase or expression that allows us to pick out exactly the things (plural) to which that general or common notion applies, no more and no fewer.

Not so in the Middle Ages. For the Middle Ages, not all uniquely identifying expressions like this are called "definitions." Some are and some are not. Those that are not are called descriptions. Those that are definitions, on the other hand, are of two kinds: some are so called real definitions, and some are nominal definitions. Thus, we have:

I. Uniquely identifying expressions

A. Descriptions

B. Definitions

1. real

2. nominal.

This schema goes back a long way. And in fact, the basis for it may be found in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* II.10. But the Middle Ages was quite familiar with the distinction even well before the *Posterior Analytics* became available in Latin in the 12th century. It was part of the general lore associated with Greek philosophy, transmitted by Boethius and others.

A nominal definition is what we might today call a stipulative definition. That is, it is a kind of agreement or decree, stating how we are going to use a certain term. In effect, a nominal definition says that we agree to use a certain word, the definiendum, as a kind of abbreviation of, or shorthand version of, a longer expression that is then called its nominal definition.

Nominal definitions, then, proceed entirely at the level of language. (That's what's nominal about them; the term here has nothing here to do with "nominalism.") They correlate words with their defining expressions, and that's that. Nominal definitions do not tell us anything about what does or does not exist in the external world, or any other informative fact about the world beyond language. They are purely a matter of our agreed upon stipulations. We can change a nominal definition, for instance, if we want to.

A real definition, on the other hand, is not like this. A real definition is not a matter of our conventional stipulations. It is not up to us. A real definition is supposed to express somehow the inner metaphysical structure of the thing defined. A real definition does not stay at the level of language; it reveals something about the structure of the world. How it does that, or how anything can do that is, of course, a matter to be negotiated, but that's at least the starting point.

The difference between a real definition and a mere description is this: a real definition uniquely picks out what is defined by expressing its inner metaphysical structure — in other words, its essence, if we want to use “essence”-talk. On the other hand, a description picks out what is described by expressing some accidental (non-essential) feature or features that, for one reason or another, together uniquely characterize what is described.

‘Featherless biped’, therefore, is not a real definition of man. It is a description. It is true that human beings and only human beings (let us say) are featherless bipeds. But that is not what it is essentially to be a man. Essentially, man is a rational animal — and the expression ‘rational animal’ gives us the real definition of man.

Of course, the question what is essential and what is accidental to a thing is a very delicate question — and in fact is one of the deepest questions I know of in this area — but I do not want to stop over it right now. I do want to say, however, that the division between essence and accident is not drawn in the Middle Ages the way it is often done today: in terms of logical modalities. That is, for the Middle Ages, the essential features of a thing are not just those it necessarily has, given that it exists at all. And the accidental features of a thing are not the same as those it may or may not have, given that it exists.

A quick way to prove this claim is to point out that the Middle Ages had the notion of an inseparable accident. This was pretty much a generally accepted notion. It appears in Porphyry's *Isagoge*, for instance (p. 11.57), although Porphyry's discussion seems to fudge on just how inseparable these accidents really are. Here is what he says:

Accident is what comes and goes without the destruction of the substrate. [That much sounds as though *all* accidents are separable — as with the modern notion of a “contingent property.”] It is divided into two kinds. One kind of accident is separable [no problem there] and the other is inseparable. [Now it sounds as if, despite what he has just said, *not all* accidents are separable after all.] Thus, sleeping is a separable accident [since I may or may not be sleeping], whereas being black is an inseparable accident of the

crow and the Ethiopian [The example is a standard one from Aristotle]. Nevertheless, a white crow and an Ethiopian who has lost his color can be conceived without the destruction of the substrate. [Now it sounds again as if we really *could* “separate” these “inseparable” accidents, after all — at least conceptually, whatever difference that makes.]

So what is going on in that passage is not altogether clear, although it certainly does bring out the notion of an inseparable accident, which is the point I want to make now. But perhaps the best source for this notion is in Aristotle himself, *Metaphysics*, v.30, which states the point quite clearly (see the 2nd passage on the handout “Two Passages from Aristotle”):

‘Accident’ has also another meaning, i.e., all that attaches to each thing in virtue of itself [that is, in virtue of the *thing*, not in virtue of the *accident*] but is not in its essence, as having its angles equal to two right angles attaches to the triangle.

The fact that the angles of a triangle add up to two right angles — i.e., 180° — is certainly not something that just may or may not happen to hold of any given triangle. It is a necessary feature of any triangle. And yet Aristotle here explicitly calls it an accident. In short, we have inseparable accidents.

The details of how all this is worked out need not detain us now, but be warned that the notion of essence and accident is perhaps not what you expect.

One other quick point. Things that don’t exist cannot have real definitions. There can be no real definition of a unicorn, a definition that expresses its essential structure. Unicorns don’t have an essential structure; they don’t exist, and so don’t have any structure at all — or anything else, for that matter.

So too, things that don’t exist cannot be described either. Just as unicorns have no essential structure, so too they have no accidental structure either, which could be expressed in a description. They don’t have any structure at all; they don’t exist.

But things that don’t exist can nevertheless be nominally defined. I can stipulate what a unicorn is (or perhaps better, what the term ‘unicorn’ means), but I cannot discover what one is, either essentially or accidentally.

Now let’s focus on real definitions, definitions that express the essence of what is defined. How do they do this? Well, they all do it in the same way: in terms of

genus plus difference.

For example, man is defined as a rational animal. In this case, ‘animal’ is the genus term and ‘rational’ is the so called difference (*differentia*) term.

Real definition always proceeds in these terms: genus + difference. And if you ask why that should be so, the answer is just that this is what they meant by a “real definition.” If you will, we can say that for the Middle Ages, the stipulative or nominal definition of the phrase ‘real definition’ requires that it always proceed by genus + difference.

One good way to think of how this goes, perhaps, is to put it in terms of questions. How would you go about asking for the real definition of something? Of course, you could just say “Give me its real definition!,” but that isn’t what we want now. We want to know what that amounts to.

Well, here’s how you ask for the real definition of a thing:

- (1) First, you ask: What is it? Here, ‘What is it?’ is not a request for the full definition (that would of course be no help), but rather means: What broad classification does the thing fit into?
- (2) Then, when you have the answer to that, you ask a second question: Where, how does it fit into that broader group? And this narrows the broad classification down to what you are looking for.

For instance,

What is man? Man is an animal. (That’s the broader group.)

Then

What kind of animal? A rational animal.

Real definition always proceeds in this two-step way: genus, then difference. (In English, we sometimes express the difference first, as when we say ‘rational animal’, because the difference is typically expressed by an adjective, and in English adjectives usually come before their nouns. But no significance should be seen in that fact; in the “natural” order of questions, the difference comes second.)

The genus is the part of the real definition that answers the broad question What is it? What is man? Man is an animal. Now in Latin, the interrogative pronoun ‘What?’ is ‘quid’. And so the genus of a thing is said to be predicated “in quid” of that thing. The phrase ‘in quid’ is a kind of horribly abbreviated way of saying “with respect to what the thing is,” or “in a way that answers the question ‘What is it’” — or in effect, “in a way that gives you the genus.” In Greek, the expression is:

ἐν τῷ τί ἐστι.

It is an Aristotelian expression, and occurs in Porphyry's *Isagoge*. (See p. 2.8.3–4, and the corresponding note in the *Notes and Texts*.)

On the other hand, the difference is the part of the real definition that answers the question What kind of a — is it?, where the pause is filled in with the genus. What is man? Man is an animal. What kind of animal? A rational one.

In Latin, the interrogative pronoun ‘What kind of?’ or ‘What manner of?’ is ‘quale’. And so the difference of a thing is said to be predicated of it not in quid, but rather in quale. In Greek the expression is

ἐν τῷ ποιόν τί ἐστίν.

It too has a genuine Aristotelian pedigree, and it too appears in Porphyry. (See p. 3.12.6 and the corresponding note in the *Notes and Texts*.)

The terms ‘in quid predication’ and ‘in quale predication’ are sometimes (e.g., in the Edward Warren translation of the *Isagoge* that I mention in my *Notes and Texts*) translated as “essential” predication and “qualitative” predication. I think those are not good translations, and the former especially is misleading, since the difference, which is predicated in quale, belongs just as much to the essence of a thing as the genus does. But I guess there is nothing wrong with this translation, provided you know what is going on.

The expression ‘qualitative predication’ is also perhaps misleading if you are not careful, because the word ‘qualitative’ — although it does come from Latin ‘quale’, which is the word involved here — nevertheless suggests the Aristotelian category of quality, which is an accident. (All the categories other than substance were said to be accidental categories.) But we are not talking about accidents here; we are giving the real definition, after all.

The same sort of opportunity for terminological confusion is present in the Latin ‘quale’, and for that matter in the Greek. So you have to keep your wits about you in reading this stuff.

Now, we have seen that the real definition is given by genus + difference. But the real definition of what? The answer: the real definition of the species. That is, here is the formula (and get this down):

genus + difference = species.

Note that this formula covers three of the five “predicables” Porphyry discusses. And, incidentally, you can perhaps now see how natural a move it was for

Porphyry, starting from Aristotle's list of four predicables in the *Topics*: definition, property, genus and accident, (if that is in fact where Porphyry started), to replace definition by species. A real definition is just what tells you the species. (Porphyry also added difference to the list, just for the sake of making it explicit, I suppose.)

Now, given this set-up, let's push a little further.

What is man? An animal (genus). What kind of animal? A rational animal (difference).

But now we can ask the same kind of questions one step higher:

What is animal? or What is an animal? It goes more smoothly in English if we use the articles, but we should do so sparingly for reasons I hope will become clearer later.

What is animal? Animal is an organism (genus).

What kind of organism? An organism with sensation (difference).

Sensation was regarded as being the difference that distinguished animals from plants within the broader genus organism, just as rationality was the difference that distinguished human beings from brute animals within the genus animal. (Sometimes the difference for animal was said to be the ability animals have to move about under their own power, in contrast to plants that are "rooted" to one place. But don't worry about that.)

So the definition of animal can be given as: sensitive organism, which doesn't mean it's "sensitive" in the — well — "sense" that it's very delicate and moody, but rather that it's something that has sensations. There's really no good English adjective here, but alternative formulations include: sensible organism, which doesn't mean there's no nonsense about it ("it's a very sensible organism"), and doesn't mean that we can sense it, but rather that it is capable of sensation. 'Sensate organism' suffers from a similar problem in English. 'Sensate' comes from the Latin passive participle '*sensatus*', and would mean something that is (or at least can be) sensed, not something that can do the sensing, which is what we want. So there's no really good English translation, but any one of these will do if you're careful.

So we have a real definition of animal just as we had a real definition of man.

But now wait a minute. A moment ago I said that animal was a genus. It was the genus of man. Now we are saying that animal has a real definition of its own, so

that animal must be a species, according to the formula for real definition: genus + difference = species. So which is it? Is animal a genus or a species?

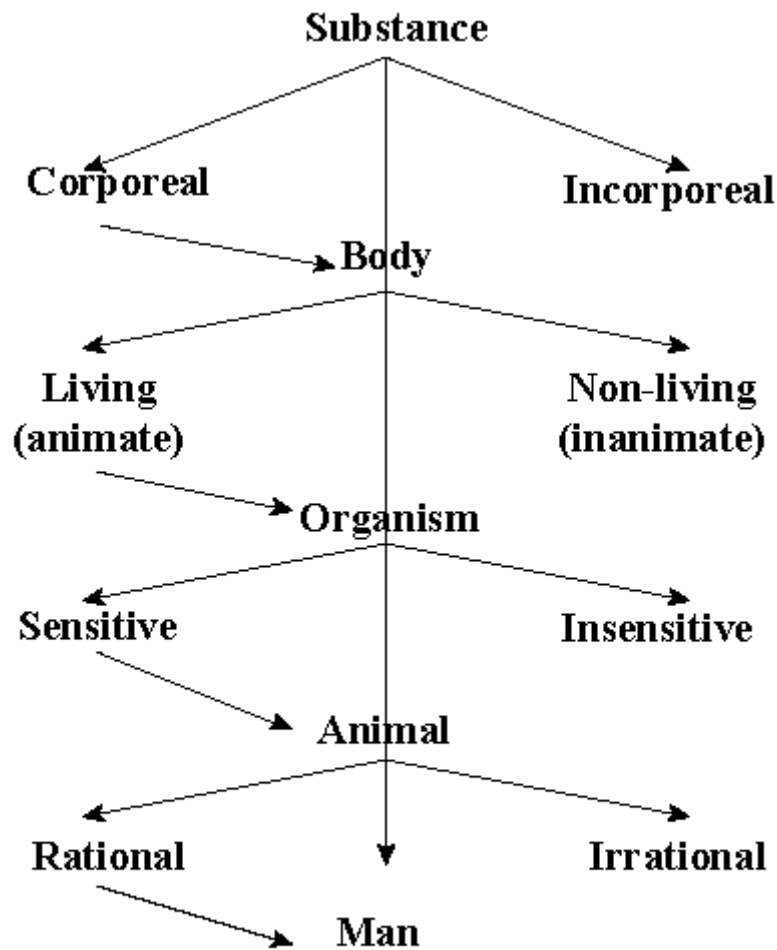
The answer, of course, is that it's both, and there is nothing wrong with that. Animal is the genus of man, but it is a species of organism.

And of course we can go yet higher. What is an organism? An organism is a body. (Genus — 'body' here doesn't mean "corpse." It means "body" in the sense in which physics uses the term: a material object.)

So an organism is a body. What kind of body? A living body (difference).

And again: What is body? Body is a substance (genus). What kind of substance? A corporeal substance, or material substance, to distinguish it from God or angels, or perhaps human souls, depending on your theory.

Now look. What we have here is a kind of "tree-structure":



The Porphyrian Tree

A structure like this is called a Porphyrian tree. In this particular case, it is a Porphyrian tree for man, which is at the bottom.

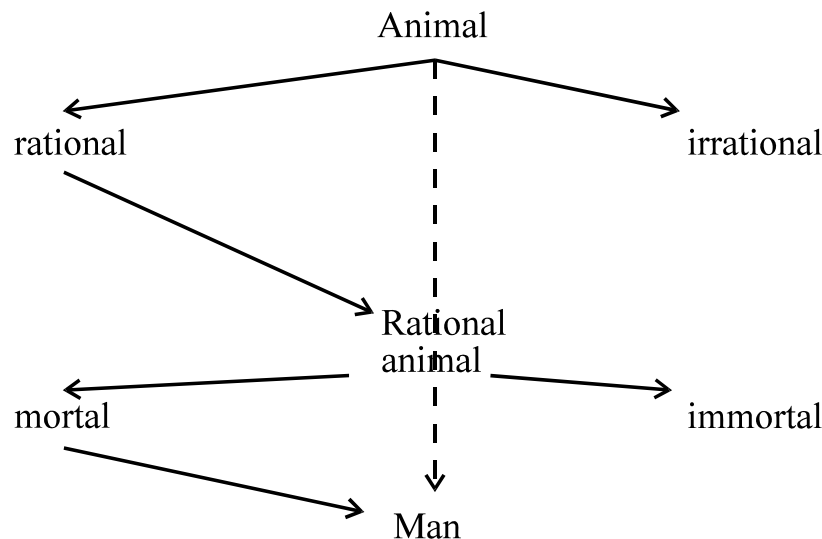
(Pass out handout of diagram of Porphyrian Tree, and also handout of MS sketch of Porphyrian Tree.)

In principle, we should be able to construct such a tree-structure for any species: for cow, dog, rock, or whatever. And we should be able to do this in any category. We may not in fact know all the steps and branches for a given tree, but in principle there should be such a hierarchical tree-structure.

But that's in principle. In practice, the Porphyrian tree you always see discussed, and the only one that was ever worked out with any kind of detail, is the Porphyrian tree for man, in the category of substance. Sometimes, therefore, when you see the term 'the Porphyrian tree', it just means the one I've just given you.

On the handout, I've given you a version of this little figure. And on the other handout, I have duplicated for you a page from an actual medieval manuscript, containing a diagram of the Porphyrian tree. Don't be surprised if you can't read it, since it's in Latin to begin with, and abbreviated Latin at that (plus two words near the bottom in some language I can't identify).

Nevertheless, notice a couple of things about the handouts. First, in the manuscript version there is an extra step between animal and man:



This reflects the fact that Porphyry himself was a pagan, and seems to have thought of the pagan gods as immortal rational animals. (Note: This would seem to imply that they are corporeal — that is, material.) Needless to say, this step quickly dropped out in Christian discussions of the Porphyrian tree (although there it is in this manuscript).

Second, notice that the manuscript adds individuals at the bottom of the tree, below man: Socrates and Plato. Let's just hold off for a moment on individuals; we'll talk about what to do with them later.

Now in the Porphyrian tree (in any Porphyrian tree, not including individuals for now), all the intermediate stages (body, organism, animal, in the example) are

both genera and species. Each is a genus with respect to the stage below it, and each is a species with respect to the stage above it.

These intermediate levels are called **subalternate genera**.

At the top end of our tree, we have substance. Substance was one of the ten Aristotelian categories, recall. Now you may well ask: Why stop there? Why can't we go further? Just as we asked: What is Man? What is animal? What is an organism? What is body? — so too, why can't we ask: What is substance?

The answer is: You can't do that, because there can be no real definition of substance (or of any category). Why not? Because, if there were, it would have to proceed in terms of genus + difference (since all real definitions do that). But there is no higher genus than substance.

That's just what a category is, after all: a highest genus, a broadest possible classification of things. When Aristotle divides the world up into ten categories, he is saying that there are ten irreducibly distinct broadest classifications into one or another of which everything can be put. The key word here is 'irreducible'. They are irreducible to one another, and they are also irreducible to anything higher — to any higher or broader classification.

The categories, then, are the most general genera, the "genera generalissima," as on the handout of the MS. Whenever you see this phrase, you should recognize that it is just a code word and means a category. Sometimes, in fact, the expression is abbreviated, and you see references to a "generalissimum" — period. That's just a category.

You may well be wondering why this should be so. Why can't we reduce the ten so called categories to a higher classification? What about being, for instance? What is wrong with saying that the ten categories are species of one super-category being?

Well, it turns out, everyone agreed that being is not a genus. Porphyry, for instance, says this (p. 5.29.8–9), and Aristotle says it quite plainly at *Metaphysics* III.3 998^b22.

The reasoning behind this is rather tricky, and it is surprisingly difficult to find it stated explicitly and in detail in the medieval texts.

Here is a handout (distribute "Why Being Is Not A Genus") in which I give you the argument as clearly as I have seen it — which is not after all very clear. I do not want to delay over the point here.

So much for the top end of the Porphyrian tree: the most general genera. What about the lower end, the species man?

Well, just as the category, substance, is a most general genus, so too the species man is said to be a most specific species, or species specialissima, as on the handout. It is sometimes also called an infima species (= “lowest species”). Just as the most general genus is a genus that is not also a species of something higher, so too a most specific species is a species that is not in turn a genus of some yet lower species. Man is as far down as you go in the line of species. There are no sub-species of men; below man there are only individuals: Socrates, Plato, and so on.

Once again, there are a lot of questions you might ask here. Why is man a lowest species? Why can't you find yet lower species? You can certainly find narrower sub-groups under man. We can talk, for instance, about Greeks vs. barbarians, males vs. females, and so on. By calling man a lowest species, we are committed to saying that these narrower sub-groupings are not genuine species. Why not?

Well, that's not an easy question. The answer to it differs considerably from author to author, and sometimes it's not clear just what an author's answer to it is. But it will obviously have something to do with what counts as an essential feature of a thing and what is merely an accidental feature of it. We'll have more to say about that later on, but we're not ready for it now.

Nevertheless, the claim is clear, even if the reasons for it are not. Man is a most specific species. Below man there are only individual men, not yet lower species. What this means, of course, is that the differences among individual men are not essential differences but accidental ones. If they were essential differences, then we would have lower species after all. Species, recall, is what is defined by a real definition, and a real definition is one that expresses the essence of a thing. If, once we had got down to the level of man, there were still further essential features of things that had not been taken into account yet, then those essential features could be brought out in yet further real definitions that would define lower species.

Thus, within the species man, all the differences among individuals are accidental ones, not essential ones. This suggests, although it does not strictly require, a doctrine we shall see explicitly later on in Boethius: the doctrine of individuation by accidents. (That is, the doctrine that these accidental differences we find among the individuals in some lowest species are not just a symptom of the fact that they are distinct individuals; they are what make them distinct individuals.) Note it now and file it away for future reference.

The notion that man is the lowest species has yet another consequence: The individual cannot be defined by a real definition. Real definitions stop at the level of the species. In order to narrow this down yet further to get an expression or phrase that uniquely picks out one individual and no other, you would have to

appeal to accidental features, which of course are out of place in a real definition (although they're OK in a description).

All right, now we've talked about genus and difference and species, and I've said a little bit about accident. That's four of Porphyry's five predicables. The remaining one is property, and I should now say a little about that.

The medieval term 'property' (proprium) is a real trap for modern students. It does not mean what the term means in present-day philosophical jargon.

In present philosophical usage, the term 'property' is used in a very broad sense, to mean pretty much any characteristic or feature of a thing. A property, in this sense, is whatever it is that is picked out by a predicate that can be truly said of a thing. (There may be funny exceptions to this, but that's the basic idea. The exceptions would be predicates like 'non-existing', etc.)

That is not the sense we have in Porphyry, or anywhere else throughout the Middle Ages. In Porphyry — and for that matter in Aristotle — the notion of property is more like the notion of private property in modern social and political philosophy. That is, it carries overtones of exclusive ownership.

In fact, 'proprius' as an adjective in Latin can frequently be translated as 'own': Save your own soul — your anima propria.

So, for example, when in medieval texts you see one thing being described as proper to another, that doesn't just mean that the former belongs to the latter. And it certainly doesn't mean it is "proper" in the sense of conforming to correct etiquette. It means that the former belongs to the latter, and to nothing else. So too, you'll see it said that A is "properly" said of B, and other such locutions. This doesn't mean there's anything wrong with calling B something else, but only that A "fits" B exactly.

In Aristotle and in Porphyry, and in medieval metaphysical discussions generally, the word 'property' means, first of all, something that is not essential to a thing (genus, difference and species are the essential predicables), but that nevertheless belongs to it and to it alone. (So exclusive ownership is only part of the story.)

Now we're not talking primarily about individuals here. In fact, Porphyry has very little to say about individuals at all in the *Isagoge*. We're talking at the level of genera and species. And when we say something is a property of a certain species, we mean that it belongs to exactly the things in that species, and to nothing else. So we say, for instance, that it is a property of the species man to be risible — that is, to have the ability to laugh.

The ability to laugh is not an essential feature of human beings; the essential features are rationality and animality — which, combined, give you humanity — and that’s all. Nevertheless, the ability to laugh is somehow supposed to follow from the essential features of human beings in such a way that all human beings, and only human beings, have the ability to laugh. The idea seems to be that you have to be an animal to have the vocal apparatus for laughing, and you have to be rational in order to see the point of the joke. The reasoning may be a little tenuous, but this was always the standard example of a property.

Properties, then, are “convertible” with their species — that is, they are coextensive — even necessarily coextensive — with their species. But they do not belong to the essences of things.

Now, if you’ve been playing close attention, you might notice that property, in the sense I’ve just described, sounds an awful lot like those inseparable accidents I mentioned a while back. In fact, when I brought up inseparable accidents, I gave you a reference to Aristotle (*Metaphysics* v.30 — see the handout “Two Passages from Aristotle”):

‘Accident’ has also another meaning, i.e., all that attaches to each thing in virtue of itself [that is, in virtue of the *thing*] but is not in its essence.

Then he gives an example:

as having its angles equal to two right angles attaches to the triangle.

It isn’t essential to the triangle to have its angles add up to 180° . It’s essential to it to be a rectilinear figure with three angles. The 180° is something that follows from that essence, and Aristotle here calls it an accident — indeed, an inseparable accident — although it also appears to fit the definition of property we’ve just given.

So what’s the difference between property and inseparable accident? That’s a very good question, and one that is not very well settled in the medieval literature. Porphyry (p. 19.121.1–6, not the same as the earlier passage I just gave you, which is from p. 11) suggests that the notion of inseparable accident is the broader notion—i.e., that properties are a kind of inseparable accident. He gives the example of blackness, which is an inseparable accident of Ethiopians, crows, coal, and ebony. In that example, the inseparable accident cuts across several species, and so doesn’t have the exclusiveness required for a property. All that’s

fine, but of course it doesn't fit the example Aristotle has just given of an inseparable accident of the triangle, which is one species.

Probably the easiest way to think of this is to regard property as a subdivision of inseparable accident: in fact, property = inseparable accident that is CONVERTIBLE with a species (and so property would give you a kind of description). But in fact these relations are not very clearly worked out in the Middle Ages. Perhaps that's because the question in the end isn't very important.

These then are some of the basic terms and notions in Porphyry's *Isagoge*. You should familiarize yourself with them, because they will be coming up all throughout this course.

Now there is a big question that I've been delaying here, and it may have been bothering you: What on earth is all this about?

We've talked about genus, species, difference, and so on. What are they? Are these things supposed to be real, or what? In short, what is the "ontological status" of these things?

Well, remember that I said that at the beginning of the *Isagoge* Porphyry mentioned three questions that he said he wasn't going to discuss because they were inappropriate for an introductory work like the *Isagoge*. The three questions are exactly the questions about the "ontological status" of these things. Here is what he says (p. 1.1.6–2.4):

...I shall abstain from the deeper questions and aim, as is appropriate, at the simpler ones.

For example, I shall beg off saying anything about **(a)** whether genera and species are real or are situated in bare thoughts alone, **(b)** whether as real they are bodies or incorporeals, and **(c)** whether they are separated or in sensibles and have their reality in connection with them. Such business is profound, and requires another, greater investigation.

This is the passage that raised the problem of universals in the form in which it was first, and perhaps most commonly, discussed in the Middle Ages. They are some of the most consequential lines in the whole history of philosophy.

Porphyry, of course, had left a perfect set-up for subsequent authors. If you want to guarantee that your followers — if any — will devote tremendous efforts to a certain problem, just be sure to mention it without saying very much about it. Porphyry might just as well have said "I dare you to talk about this."

Well, people took up the challenge, and Boethius was the first to take it up in the Latin world. (Note that Porphyry does not suggest these three questions are original with him; in fact, he seems to be suggesting they had been discussed for a long time. And that's certainly right; the Greek commentary tradition had talked about these issues for a long time. But of course the Greek commentaries were effectively lost to the Latin West — until Boethius.)

So now let's get down to business and turn to Boethius.

Boethius

First, let us look at where we are chronologically. Porphyry wrote the *Isagoge* in the late third century AD. Boethius lived from 480 to 524/526. So he was writing in the early sixth century. There is a period of over 200 years between them. What happened to the problem of universals in the meantime?

The answer, surprisingly, is very little. In the Greek world, the main philosophical current was neo-Platonism, in its most flamboyant form. There simply wasn't much serious and careful discussion of the problem of universals. (Earlier, there was some discussion in commentaries on Aristotle, etc. But not like what we are about to see in the Latin world.) In fact, there isn't really any serious and careful discussion of the problem in Porphyry either. He raises the questions, but doesn't answer them. And what he does say, in the *Isagoge* and in his other writings, does not present a very carefully worked out view.

Taken by himself, then, Porphyry would not be a very important figure in the history of the problem of universals. His importance is based entirely on the fact that Boethius translated him and used his text as the occasion for discussing the problem on his own, and by so doing, set things up for the rest of the Middle Ages and beyond.

In the Latin world, there simply wasn't much high-quality, precise philosophy before Boethius. There was some, but most of it tended to be of the ethical kind, and was more “wisdom literature” than what we would think of today as hard-headed philosophy. The most important Latin author before Boethius was St. Augustine, who was probably the most important and influential philosopher who ever wrote! Augustine is a thinker for whom I have infinite respect. But he had little to say about the problem of universals. (He does have some very important things to say about related topics, however — notably about the notion of “divine ideas,” which was his answer to the Platonic Forms. But he had virtually nothing to say about the problem of universals directly.)

So that leaves us with Boethius. For some material on his life and writings, see Ch. 22 of the “Course in the Box” Version 3.0 beta. (I’ve given you a handout on this.)

Boethius discussed the problem of universals in several places. He wrote two commentaries on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, for instance, and a commentary on the *Categories*. He also wrote two commentaries on Aristotle’s *De interpretatione*, which contains the important passage at the beginning of Ch. 7 (*De interpretatione* 7 17^a38–^b1):

Among things, some are universal while others are singular. By “universal” I mean that which is apt to be predicated of many, by “singular” that which is not. For example, man is a universal, Callias a singular.

As you can imagine, commentaries on that passage (by Boethius and others) will prove to be very interesting. I’ve given you a passage from Boethius’s second commentary on it in the *Notes and Texts*.

Boethius is also the author of the famous *Consolation of Philosophy*, which contains a few remarks pertaining to universals, although not much. He also wrote a group of relatively short works, collectively called the *Theological Tractates*, and some of them contain a great deal of important and influential material on this topic. I’ve translated some of it in “Boethius, Two Texts from His *Theological Tractates*” in the *Notes and Texts*, and there are complete translations (of varying quality) in the Loeb edition of Boethius, on reserve in the Wells Library.

If you want some further reading on Boethius’s views on universals, see Jorge Gracia, *Introduction to the Problem of Individuation in the Early Middle Ages*, Chap. 2, and Peter King’s dissertation, *Peter Abailard and the Problem of Universals*, Chaps. 1 and 2, particularly Chap. 2. (Both on reserve.) King also gives you a translation of the relevant passage from Boethius’s first commentary on Porphyry, in vol. 2 of his dissertation. I am going to concentrate on the second and longer commentary on Porphyry, and on the *Theological Tractates*. I will bring in other Boethian writings only occasionally.

There are different theories of universals found in Boethius, depending on where you look. In fact, I have a thesis I am sometimes tempted to believe, that every theory of universals ever held in the Middle Ages can — in a non-trivial way — be found at least in germ in Boethius. There are probably exceptions to this claim, but they will take some looking.

There is one theory of universals to be found in the second commentary on Porphyry. The same view, more or less, is found with some refinements and

additions, in certain passages of the *Theological Tractates*. But there is also a quite different theory found — or at least suggested — in other passages of the *Tractates*, and in certain other texts.

Let's begin with the second commentary on Porphyry (in *Five Texts*). In the first commentary, Boethius had based his work on the translation by Marius Victorinus (a Latin *rhetor* contemporary with St. Augustine), whereas in the second commentary he translated the text of Porphyry himself.

The passage we are concerned with is the passage where Porphyry raises and then dismisses three questions about the ontological status of genera and species. It's the commentary on that passage that I have translated in *Five Texts*, and that I want to discuss now.

First, let's be sure the text as Boethius translated (p. 20.1.1–5) it really says the same thing as the text of Porphyry's Greek (p. 1.2.1–5). If you look at my English translation of the two of them, you will see that they pretty much say the same thing, with one exception that may or may not be important.

Here is how Boethius translates it (*Five Texts*, p. 20.1.1–5):

“As for genera and species,” he [= Porphyry] says, “I shall decline for the present to say **(a)** whether they subsist or are posited in bare understandings only, **(b)** whether, if they subsist, they are corporeal or incorporeal, and **(c)** whether they are separated from sensibles or posited in sensibles and agree with them. For that is a most exalted matter, and requires a longer investigation.”

The word I want to focus on here is the word ‘subsist’. (Porphyry himself has a rather more neutral word here, one I have translated as ‘real’.) As it turns out, this word ‘subsist’ is something of a technical term in the Boethian vocabulary.

He defines it in one his *Theological Tractates*, called “On Person and the Two Natures” (*De persona et duabus naturis*). It's a Christological treatise, and is concerned with the theological doctrine that in Christ there is only one person — the second person of the Trinity, in fact — but two natures: the divine nature and a human nature. An alternative title of the work is “Against Eutyches and Nestorius” (*Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*), who were the authors (or said to be the authors) of two heretical views on this Christological question. The work is generally referred to by its shortened title “*Contra Eutychem*,” and that is how I shall refer to it here. I have translated the relevant lines in the *Notes and Texts*, as the first passage in “Boethius, Two Texts from His *Theological Tractates*” (pp. 49–51).

In this passage, he explains the difference between subsisting, on the one hand, and substanting or being a substance, on the other. See especially lines 44-47:

For that “subsists” which does not need accidents in order to be able to be. But that “substands” which furnishes a certain subject to other accidents, so that they may be. For it “stands under” them [= sub+stands], as long as it is a subject for accidents.

Basically, what he is saying in these and the surrounding lines is that a subsistent is what does not need any accidents in order to be. A subsistent, therefore, is an independent entity in a fairly strong sense of the word.

Now substances are a sub-class of the things that subsist. See lines 47–52:

Hence genera and species only subsist. [Note: This would seem to answer Boethius’s version of Porphyry’s first question, as Boethius translates it.] For accidents do not befall genera and species. But individuals not only subsist, they also substand. For neither do they need accidents in order to be. For they are already informed by their properties and specific differences, and provide to accidents the opportunity to be — that is to say, as long as they [= the individuals] are subjects.

A substance is a subsistent, therefore, and so doesn’t need any accidents in order to exist, but nevertheless has them anyway — “stands under them,” supports them, gives them being.

It follows from this that, since substances do not need accidents, they could lose their accidents without losing their own identity or being otherwise destroyed in the process. And indeed, that is pretty much the way an accident is defined. Remember Porphyry (p. 11.57.1–2):

Accident is what comes and goes without the destruction of the substrate.

(If you say “What about inseparable accidents then?,” the answer is: “I told you that was a tough one.”)

Get this picture clearly in your mind: Accidents depend on their substances, not the other way around.

In the passage I just read you from the *Contra Eutychen*, Boethius says that genera and species subsist but are not substances. They don’t need, and in fact don’t have, accidents. (So much then for Porphyry’s first question.)

Individuals, on the other hand, not only subsist, they are also substances. They do have accidents, even though they don't need them.

Now, back to Boethius's commentary on Porphyry: If we understand Boethius's translation of Porphyry's first question as asking whether genera and species subsist in the sense just defined in the *Contra Eutychen*, then we have a fairly clear grasp of that first question: Boethius is asking whether genera and species are independent entities in their own right, insofar as they do not need accidents in order to exist.

Unfortunately, the situation is not as clear as that. For, in the same passage from the *Contra Eutychen*, Boethius tells us (p. 50.42–44) that he is using the nominal and verbal forms of 'subsist' to translate forms of the Greek οὐσιῶσις (the noun), or οὐσιῶσθαι (the verb), whereas 'substance' and 'substand' he uses to translate forms of Greek ὑπόστασις or ὑφίστασθαι, respectively.

Now, I'm not sure what the best way is to translate these Greek terms into English. But the point to note is that Boethius does not stick to these translating conventions in his commentary on Porphyry.

That is, when in the first question, Boethius translates Porphyry as asking whether genera and species subsist, the Greek word he is translating there is not οὐσιῶσθαι, as it ought to be according to the conventions announced in the *Contra Eutychen*, but rather ὑφίστασθαι, which according to the *Contra Eutychen* ought to be translated 'substands'.

What are we to make of this? Is this just a kind of terminological looseness and imprecision on Boethius's part, or is he deliberately changing the sense of Porphyry's first question? It's not clear, but I suspect it's just the former, and that Boethius interprets Porphyry's first question in the way we've just discussed.

But it is clear that, however that turns out, this problem is one that is only going to bother someone who reads Boethius and compares it to the Greek. For the medieval Latins, who did not for the most part read Greek, the interpretation suggested by the *Contra Eutychen* would be the only plausible way to read this passage.

Let's turn back now to the text of the commentary on Porphyry.

Boethius's discussion takes the following form. First, he gives arguments on both sides of the issue — pro and con. Then he resolves the argument, giving his own theory.

This format is a common one in later medieval philosophy — and we will see it in Scotus and Ockham in a highly developed form. It is called the quaestio form. If

you look at Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*, for instance, you will see that it is written entirely as a series of such *quaestiones*.

You have to be very careful in reading something written in this *quaestio* format. The author may be presenting an argument that does not reflect his own view. He may simply be setting it up as one of the preliminary pro and con arguments, only to be rejected later. Always look to the context before you assume that a medieval author is speaking his own mind when he gives an argument.

So, first we get the pro and con arguments, and then we get Boethius's own view — or at least the view he is defending in this work. (You'll see later why I add the qualification.) To begin with, we get the negative arguments — that is, the arguments that genera and species do not subsist. (Actually, Boethius's arguments are stronger than that: He argues that they do not exist at all — whether as a subsistent, i.e., an independent entity, or even presumably as an accident. This just aggravates the doubt over exactly how we are to understand 'subsist' here.) So, what we are getting here is the argument against realism, and so the argument for nominalism. Here's how it goes (*Five Texts*, pp. 21.11.1–22.12.3 — I am paraphrasing):

(1) To be is to be one. That is, anything that is is one thing, and conversely, if a thing is one thing, then it is. Being and unity, therefore, are coextensive notions, or to use the medieval lingo, they are “convertible.” (See p. 22.12.2: “Everything that exists exists for the reason that it is one.” Note that the statement of this premise comes at the end of the argument, not at the beginning. This “backwards” way of presenting arguments is not at all uncommon in medieval texts. You'll just have to get used to it.)

Even if you think of a “collective” entity, like an army, which is after all not one soldier but many soldiers, nevertheless it is one army. If you think an individual soldier is a unity, a unified organism, in a stronger, more metaphysically “robust” sense than the kind of low-grade, derivative, loose and second-order collective unity the army has, that is fine. But in exactly the same sense, and to exactly the same degree, this premise claims, the individual soldier is a being in a much stronger and more robust sense than the kind of derivative, shadowy, loose and second-order collective being the army has.

The convertibility of being and unity, therefore, is a basic premise of this first argument we're looking at in paras. (11)–(12).

Indeed, you might suspect — and reasonably suspect — that the convertibility of being and unity is a presupposition of the whole problem of universals in the first place. You might think that without that principle, there simply is no problem of universals. If universals could somehow be real without having to be in any way

one, then what's the problem about having a universal humanity in Socrates and Plato at the same time? If you're willing to count Socrates's humanity and Plato's humanity as a universal humanity even if they're not the same one thing, then what further objection can there be to admitting the reality of universals? (You might respond that the "further problem" is that you can't do that, but that's just to reaffirm that every being is one being.) In short, if you're willing to weaken your realism to the point that it's indistinguishable from nominalism, then of course the nominalist will have no further quarrel with you, and the "problem" of universals has disappeared.

Now I say you might think this. I thought so too for a long time. And, I must confess, I'm still inclined to think so. But, as it turns out, there may be later on in this passage — para. (13) — an argument against universals that doesn't depend on the convertibility of being and unity. This is a possible interpretation I only came to recognize late in life, and I find it a very suggestive and intriguing possibility. But I'm not going to talk about it in lecture. I do have a paper, "Boethius against Universals," that talks about it in § VIII (web-published on my Mediaeval Logic and Philosophy website). I will distribute this paper in a handout later on, since there are other things in it I do want to talk about, and you can read § VIII then if you wish. The argument in para. (13) depends on an obscure infinite-regress argument we will discuss soon. But I want to refer you to it at least even now.

In any case, the argument we're looking at now, at this point in our discussion, does explicitly take the principle of the convertibility of being and unity as a premise.

Now, whether or not you can get a problem of universals without appealing to this principle, it nevertheless seems to be a highly plausible thing to say. In fact, it is a fundamental principle that many people would find impossible — even senseless — to deny.

It can be found, for example, in Aristotle, *Metaphysics* X.2, especially the end of the chapter, where he says:

And that in a sense unity means the same thing as being is clear from the fact that it follows the categories in as many ways, and is not comprised within any category [recall how being is not a genus], e.g., neither in substance nor in quality, but is related to them just as being is; and from the fact that in 'one man' nothing more is predicated than in 'man', just as being is nothing apart from substance or quality or quantity; and to be one is just to be a particular thing.

Now for a bit of a digression. Plausible though it is, and despite Aristotle's personal authorization, we cannot take this principle for granted. Boethius is getting the principle of the "convertibility" of being and unity from St. Augustine, who made a big deal about it because some people had denied it. Indeed, there is a long and quite reputable philosophical tradition, one that still exists today, that denies the convertibility of being and unity.

For example, at *Republic* VI.509^b9, Plato describes the Form of the Good as "above being," and Plotinus says the same thing, explicitly quoting Plato's Greek, at *Enneads*, I.7.1. Many Neo-Platonists, in fact — like Plotinus — have as one of their central notions something they call "The One," which they explicitly identify with Plato's Form of the Good, and describe as above being.

So, for many Neo-Platonists (see the handout "The Greek Background to Mediaeval Philosophy"), the One is something that is a unity — in fact, it is the most unified thing of all — and yet is not a being. (Note that, by itself, this would not be enough to disarm the problem of universals, because although it's true that for these Neo-Platonists there are unities that are not beings, it's still true for them that there is no being that isn't a unity.)

The reason for denying the equation of being and unity here comes from another equation that goes back at least to Parmenides, and that almost everyone held. It is still held in effect today (although people don't usually formulate it this way any more). This is the equation of being with intelligibility. What is can be understood, and vice versa. Perhaps we mere humans are not in a position to understand certain things that are, but in principle they are intelligible in themselves. An unlimited intellect could grasp them.

This is the reason, for instance, why Plato's Forms (apart from the Form of the Good, which is special) are not only the only things that truly are, they are also the only things that are truly intelligible. (For Plato, this world is the realm of opinion, remember.)

Now if (for whatever reason) you believe that some things — some one things — cannot be understood, and that this unintelligibility is not just a matter of our poor, finite intellects, but that they cannot in principle be understood (in other words, that this is something about them, not about us), and if you accept the equation of being with intelligibility (as virtually everyone did), then you must reject the equation of being with unity.

And that is exactly what many Neo-Platonists did. The Neo-Platonists' One, by being "beyond being," is also "beyond intelligibility." That is, the One is utterly mysterious and ineffable. You can't say anything that would describe it. You can

only talk about it negatively, or by the most strained and inadequate kinds of metaphor.

This strand of Western thinking is still with us today, and — I want to emphasize — is a reputable tradition; it's not just mystery-mongering. It is present, for example, when Paul Tillich (who is unfortunately not still with us today) says that God is not a being, but "the ground of being." Tillich stands squarely in this Neo-Platonic tradition. By saying that God is not a being, he is not professing atheism, he is not saying that God fails to exist. He is saying that God more than exists, he is above being.

This same tradition is also behind what is sometimes called "darkness mysticism" in the Western tradition, where the mystical experience of God is not described in terms of a "blinding flash of light" (light is always an intellectual metaphor in Western thought), but rather as "A Cloud of Unknowing," a "Dark Night of the Soul."

There is also a tradition of "light mysticism" in the West — for instance in Augustine. And for that matter, in Plato — whose "Allegory of the Cave" in the *Republic* is, after all, probably the most famous statement of light-mysticism there is. (This despite the fact that the Form of the Good, which is the Sun in the "Cave Allegory," is also said in the very same work to be "above being." Plato himself seems a little unclear on exactly where to locate the Form of the Good.)

Now Augustine, I said, denied this part of the Neo-Platonic tradition, and equated being with unity. And he did this for a pretty good reason. The Neo-Platonic One looks an awful lot like God. But, on the other hand, there is the famous and important Scriptural passage in Exodus 3:14, where God tells Moses "I am who am," and "Go tell the Israelites that He Who Is sent you to them." Augustine took this very seriously, and so did the entire subsequent Augustinian tradition. The text implies — in fact, it emphasizes — that God is a being, and indeed is a being par excellence. (At least that's the way Augustine interpreted it; heaven only knows what it really means.)

Augustine, then, accommodated this text to the Neo-Platonic notion that the One is the highest and most exalted thing of all, the very ideal of Goodness, and so to be identified with God — and simply drew the inevitable conclusion: Unity is not above being, as Plotinus and other Neo-Platonists say. Unity and Being are convertible.

As Étienne Gilson put it in his brilliant and exasperating book, *Being and Some Philosophers*:¹

What makes the greatness of St. Augustine in the history of Christian philosophy is that, deeply imbued with Neoplatonism as he was, he yet never made the mistake of devaluating being, not even in order to extol the One.

All this should be kept in mind, then, when we find Boethius using the premise “To be is to be one.” It’s not a trivial point for him, trivial either in the sense that he could take for granted or in the sense that it would be without important consequences.

END OF DISGRESSION

Let us return now to Boethius’s argument against the reality of universals. (We are still paraphrasing *Five Texts*, pp. 21.11.1–22.12.3.)

First step: To be is to be one, as we have seen.

Second step: But genera and species are supposed to be common to many (recall the motivation in my chalk example back at the beginning of this course), and **THEREFORE** (note the ‘therefore’) not one. Hence, from step (1), genera and species (and for that matter, any universal, although Boethius doesn’t generalize the point) cannot subsist — and, for that matter, they cannot be at all.

This is a radically compressed paraphrase of pp. 21.11.1–22.12.3. But if you’ll look carefully at those lines, I think you’ll see that this is basically what the argument is.

The crucial step, of course, is the second one. Note the implicit assumption (at the ‘therefore’), that what is common to many in the way in which, say, humanity is supposed to be common to Socrates and Plato, is itself many. In other words, the plurality of individuals to which humanity is common somehow is contagious; it somehow infects the species humanity itself, and so destroys its unity.

Why should anyone think this is so? Well, presumably it is going to have something to do with the way in which universals are supposed to be common to their individuals. We’ll return to that point in a moment.

First, let’s go on in the text. We’ve looked at §§ (11)–(12). Let’s look now at § (13).

¹Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed., (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), p. 31.

Here Boethius gives a very curious infinite regress argument, the point of which is not very clear at first. The difficulties with the passage are two: (1) first, to figure out just what the argument is in the paragraph, and (2) second, to determine just what role the argument plays in the discussion as a whole. With respect to (1), what I am about to say conforms to what I said in “The Course in the Box” Version 2.0 (NB), Chap. 23, pp. 5–7. With respect to (2), however, I’ve thought some more about the matter, and what I am going to say now is quite different from what I said in “The Course in the Box.” If you’re interested, here is a **HANDOUT** entitled “Boethius against Universals: The Arguments in the *Second Commentary on Porphyry*.”

Let’s look at the paragraph, then. (**Read para. (13.)**)

OK, here we go:

Suppose you agree with Boethius so far (i.e., in paras. (11)–(12)). In that case, the humanity of Socrates and the humanity of Plato cannot possibly be one humanity, but must be two. (We still do not have the full reasoning behind this, but let’s just grant it for now.) The plurality of individual humans, therefore, introduces a plurality into the species “humanity” itself. Or, to put it another way, the term ‘humanity’ is no longer a proper name, so to speak, of one universal entity, but rather a common name or common noun applicable to the humanity of this individual and also to the (distinct) humanity of that individual. In effect, this is what the argument in paragraphs (11)–(12) amounted to.

Thus, while humanity, just like that, is not one thing, any given humanity is. The humanity of Socrates is one, and the humanity of Plato is one, and so on. Each of these two humanities is peculiar and private to the individual whose humanity it is. Neither is shared or common, although of course they are quite similar. (We have a nominalist picture here.)

Boethius puts this by saying that the species is “multiple and not one in number” (p. 22.13.1–2).

Now, for our first puzzle with this passage, there’s a question about exactly what that phrase means. I discuss it in my paper “Boethius against Universals” that I just mentioned, and I won’t say much more about it here. The question arises over whether by something that is “multiple and not one in number” Boethius means some kind of collection — as he says in a passage from the *Contra Eutychen*, a “heap or chorus.” There’s some textual basis for this conjecture, but in the end I don’t find altogether persuasive. See my paper for details.

However that turns out, suppose you agree with the claim — “species is multiple and not one in number.” Nevertheless, you might still want to preserve some kind of realism. Suppose then that genus and species do exist (the realist move), but

are “multiple and not one in number” — whatever that means. What is supposed to follow from that? Well, Boethius gives an example in terms of the genus *animal*, and argues somehow that there would be an infinite regress, and so “no last genus.” Presumably this is supposed to be an unacceptable result, so that the argument in (13) as a whole amounts to a *reductio*.

OK, now notice something already. What is the unacceptable conclusion this argument in (13) is trying to derive? That “there will be no last genus,” he says. Now even though no one I know of has ever interpreted the passage this way, the phrase ‘last genus’ certainly suggests the interpretation “highest genus,” a “most general genus” or category, so that the argument would then be that the existence of universals that “are multiple and not one in number” would violate the Aristotelian theory of the categories. Surely the argument in the rest of the paragraph doesn’t suggest that this is what is going on at all, but the claim ‘there will be no last genus’, taken by itself, certainly sounds like it.

Everyone who has ever written about or discussed this argument has, as far as I know, in effect taken it for granted that this is not what is going on in it. In fact, I, in “The Course in the Box,” and Peter King in his dissertation, when we paraphrase this argument, cast it not in terms of the genus ‘animal’, as Boethius himself had done, but in terms of the species ‘man’ or ‘humanity’. It’s as if we’ve been tacitly assuming that the fact that Boethius puts his example in terms of the genus ‘animal’ is purely accidental, and that the argument is meant to apply to any universal, whether a genus, a species or whatever.

And I think this is the right interpretation in fact. Evidence for it can perhaps be found in the fact that all the other arguments in this part of Boethius’s discussion are put in terms of genus too, and nevertheless at the end of paragraph (12), Boethius says “[t]he same can be said about species.” Again, at the end of the paragraph (19), he says “[a]nd the same is to be understood for the other predicables.”

But if this is so, if there is nothing unusual about genus in this argument, then what are we to make of the very first sentence of paragraph (13): “But even if genus and species do exist, but are multiple and not one in number, there will be no last genus”? Notice what the sentence does not say. It does not say that if genus exists and is multiple, there will be no last genus, and if species exists and is multiple, there will be no last species. Rather, on the most natural reading, what it says is that in either case, there will be no last genus. In other words, we will get the same result — no last genus — whether we start the argument by talking about genus or by talking about species. And if it is species we are talking about instead of genus, that result — that “there will be no last genus” — would mean that somewhere in the argument we move from species to genus, and so to

something broader than what we began with. If that step is repeated as the regress goes on, then the regress is not just a regress of further and further stages, but a regress that involves increasing generality. And if that's what's going on, then — however the argument works in detail — we do have a regress that does away with the Aristotelian theory of the categories as “most general genera.”

Nevertheless, it remains true, as we shall see, that the actual argument in the rest of paragraph (13) doesn't seem to involve any kind of regress to ever-increasing levels of generality, and no one has ever interpreted the argument as if it did.

We're left then with an initial puzzle about paragraph (13): Its first sentence would lead one to expect something quite different from the actual argument given in the paragraph. That may be significant or not, but there it is.

Now let's look at the actual argument in paragraph (13). What exactly is the objectionable infinite regress Boethius thinks he has found?

Well, consider several animals, say, Socrates, Plato and the delightfully named Brownny the Ass. (= Brunellus. We will meet Brownny the Ass later on. He is Peter Abelard's favorite example of an irrational animal. He will have a distinguished future. I use him here because I wanted to include another animal that's not in the species man.)

Now Socrates, Plato and Brownny the Ass are “not the same” (see line 4 of the paragraph), since there are three of them, and yet they have “a certain similar something” (same line). In other words, they are alike in being animals. And “for that reason,” he says (next line, line 5), we look for their genus.

That is to say, likeness — being alike — is a matter of coming under the same universal. In this case it's a genus — animality. (Recall the similar argument I gave when I was setting out the realist response to the problem of universals at the very beginning of this course. The fact that we recognize certain things as being “alike” in various ways means there must be something they have in common; otherwise our “recognition” would be a distortion — and all the epistemological disasters consequent on nominalism would follow at once.)

But the genus itself, by the hypothesis of the whole argument in paragraph (13), is not “one in number” but just as “multiple” as our three animals were to begin with. That is, Socrates's animality, Plato's animality and Brownny's animality are three animalities that are “not the same,” just as Socrates, Plato and Brownny themselves were three animals that are not the same. But these three animalities are alike in being animalities, and therefore they too “have a certain similar something,” so that we must look for their genus in turn. And off we go on our regress.

That's the argument.

Comment: It's a little hard to get a good grip on what's going on here. Notice first of all that, as I suggested earlier, on this reading the argument does not proceed in terms of a regress of increasing generality of the kind that would result in there being no highest genus and therefore in a rejection of the Aristotelian theory of the categories. If there are three animals, then there are three animalities and three of that "similar something" those animalities have — call it animality-hood or whatever. And so it goes: three all the way up, never anything more general than that.

Now if this really is the form of the argument in paragraph (13) — and I think it is — then, although it's certainly obscurely put, it really isn't anything we haven't in effect seen before — at least "in germ."

Remember back to the very beginning of this course, when I was arguing both sides of the problem of universals by means of my two pieces of chalk.

In that discussion, I started off by asking "How many colors do you see here? One or two?" Then I said that to the nominalist's response that he sees two colors, although they are exactly alike, the realist would respond: "Oh, what you're calling the two colors of the two pieces of chalk are really just two instances of the one color whiteness. Otherwise, how could you tell they were exactly alike?"

Notice what's happening here. We started off asking what it was that made the two pieces of chalk alike. Was it one universal color whiteness, as the realist maintained, or was it two exactly similar individual whitenesses, as the nominalist maintained? To the nominalist answer that it was two whitenesses that are alike, the realist then asks what it is that makes the two whitenesses alike. Notice how we've moved up one level — from talking about similar pieces of chalk to talking about similar individual whitenesses. And of course the same dialectic can be played out at this higher level, although I didn't do it when I was talking about the chalk. In fact, it can be played out as many times as you want — and there doesn't seem to be any progress made.

Now that is exactly the kind of infinite regress Boethius seems to be talking about in paragraph (13). If Socrates, Plato and Brownie the Ass are all similar animals not because they share in some one universal animality, but instead each has its own individual animality that is similar to the other two's, then how do we account for the similarity of those animalities? (Not similar animals now, but similar animalities.)

And if you say that each of those animalities is like the others not because they all share in some one universal "animality-hood" (or whatever you call it), but

because each animality has its own animality-hood that is exactly like that of all the other animalities, then (you see) we're off on an infinite regress.

So in effect the argument in paragraph (13) is directed against what might be called a "last-stand realist" — someone who might be willing to grant the nominalist line at a certain basic level, and even at higher levels, but who at some point is going to insist that we're going to have to ground this "cascade" of similarities in some one universal.

But of course it should be obvious that the realist has not made his case, and therefore that Boethius's argument in paragraph (13) has to be taken seriously — obscure though it is. Whatever reason led the nominalist to say that animality is not one thing but many similar things, the same reason would seem to apply to animality-hood, or whatever we call it, one step up — that is, to whatever it is that all animalities have in common. And so the nominalist can say that animality-hood itself will not be one either, despite the realist's argument; it too turns out to be split up, to be "multiple and not one in number," as Boethius puts it, so that, just as Socrates has his own animality, and so does Plato, so too the animality of Socrates has its own animality-hood, and so does the animality of Plato. These several animality-hoods are distinct, but of course they are similar, so that the realist might be tempted to try yet again one step higher. But, of course, what we have here is an infinite regress.

The point is: Each time the realist makes his realist argument, the nominalist can counter with his nominalist line. And we can play that game as long as we like. The realist who refuses to give up is therefore committed to an infinite regress.

Now you might well ask: Why should it be the realist who has to give up? Why not the nominalist?

And of course the answer to that trade-off is that the whole thing depends on the force of that original nominalist move, whatever it was that led the nominalist to say that Socrates, Plato and Brownie have three animalities and not one. If that move, whatever it is, is legitimate, then it will presumably work at each step of the infinite regress, so that there would have to be something wrong with what the realist is doing.

So let's turn back to that initial nominalist move. We've already seen one argument for it, in paragraphs (11)–(12), in terms of the convertibility of being and unity. But of course there was a crucial gap in that argument that I said we would come back to.

The gap was in the move from saying that a universal was supposed to be common to many to saying that therefore the universal itself had to be many, that

the plurality of things that share in a universal somehow infects the universal itself and makes it a plurality too.

Boethius says some further things along these lines in paragraphs (14)–(18). And of course, the whole thing depends crucially on the notion of exactly how a universal is supposed to be “common to many.”

Well, Boethius says, just how can one thing be said to be common to many?

(a) First of all — para. (15) — one thing can be common to many part by part, as happens for instance when we all share a pizza . You get one slice and I get another. None of us gets the whole thing. In fact, if I do take the whole pizza and hog it all myself, then we no longer are said to “share” it.

But genus and species are not supposed to be common or shared in the way a pizza is. Socrates and Plato don’t have only slices or pieces of human nature. Each of them is supposed to possess human nature as a whole. Indeed, the whole point of saying that we all have a common human nature is just to be able to say that I have exactly what you have, not just a different slice or part of a larger whole. So universals are supposed to be common as a whole to several things.

(b) Well, then — para. (16) — a single thing can be common to several things as a whole, but at different times. For instance, Boethius says, a slave or a horse. The idea is that I buy a slave or a horse, and he belongs to me totally, not just in part. I don’t have to share him with anyone else. But then I sell him to you, and he is totally yours, not just in part. So the slave or horse belongs as a whole to both of us, but at different times.

But that’s not the way genus and species are supposed to be held in common. Human nature is not something we all take turns possessing — like the three Norns of Norse mythology. No, universals are supposed to be common to or shared by several things as a whole and at the same time.

(c) Well, then — para. (17) — a single thing can be common to several things as a whole and at the same time, in the way a show or spectacle is. That is, for instance, we all stand around and watch the same performance. We all see the whole thing, not just part of it, and we all see the whole thing at the same time. (Ignore the fact that the show itself may be spread out over time — as, for instance, with a three-act play. That’s irrelevant. The point is that we don’t have to take turns seeing it.)

But this is still not the way genus and species are supposed to be common or shared. Genus and species are supposed to be common as a whole at the same time to several things, Boethius says, in such a way that they constitute their substance. Boethius is of course talking about genus here, and in particular about the genus animal, which is in the category of substance. So he would have to put this point rather differently if he were talking about universal properties or accidents — for example, risibility, or if he were talking about other categories than substance. But, however you put the point, it is clear that a universal is supposed to enter into the metaphysical make-up of the things to which it is common in a much more intimate way than a show or spectacle does. Exactly what that “metaphysical intimacy” is will of course be something we’ll have to examine more carefully in due course.

If you combine all this, we are now in a position to see that a universal is supposed to be something — para. (18) — that is common to many things **(a)** as a whole, **(b)** simultaneously, and **(c)** in such a way as to enter into their metaphysical make-up in a particularly intimate way.

In effect, what we have just seen is an attempt to define the notion of a universal. And, although there are still some questions (particularly about the exact kind of relation involved in **(c)**), it is really a pretty good, and even an admirable attempt.

Very often people argue about universals without ever stopping to specify exactly what it is they are talking about, as though the notion of a universal were something plain and obvious and agreed upon by everyone. In fact, of course, it is nothing of the kind. Boethius’s definition here is a pretty good attempt to specify what we are talking about. It will be a very influential definition, as we shall see, although it will not be the only one in the Middle Ages.

Now Boethius thinks that no one thing can be common to many things in all the ways required by this account of a universal. And obviously, the claim here will depend especially on what the peculiar sort of metaphysical “intimacy” is that universals are supposed to have with the things that possess them (see clause **(c)**). Unfortunately, Boethius doesn’t say anything more about it in this passage, and we are left with not quite everything we need for a complete assessment of the argument against universals in paragraphs (11)–(19).

In any case, this whole passage — paragraphs (11)–(19) — is Boethius’s argument against universals, and it is supposed to show that genera and species do not subsist — or, for that matter, are not real at all. Later on, when we come to Peter Abelard in the twelfth century, we’ll see further arguments, of different kinds, for this nominalist position.

Before we turn to the other side, to the realist argument for universals, there are a number of things I want to point out about the argument we have just seen and about the attempt to define a universal that we've just gone through.

- (1) First of all, observe that the argument is a purely metaphysical one, just as we have by now come to expect. The difficulties with a realist view of universals, recall, are metaphysical or ontological ones. How can there be the kinds of entities that universals are supposed to be?
- (2) Second, I used to think that the attempt to define a universal that we have just seen in paragraphs (14)–(18) was Boethius's own original account. I still think that Boethius was the first to use such considerations to try to define universals (or at least I know of no one earlier who did so), but I have now come to realize that Boethius was not being altogether original here.

Take a look, for instance, at the passage from Porphyry in the *Notes and Texts*, not his *Isagoge* but from another work of his, called *Exposition of Aristotle's Categories by Question and Answer* (pp. 41–42). This is a work that survives only in a single badly mangled manuscript, so that there are a number of textual difficulties with it. But it is an exceedingly interesting work anyway.

The passage I have given you in the *Notes and Texts* comes from part of the commentary on the very first words of the *Categories*. At the beginning of the *Categories*, you may recall, Aristotle discusses homonyms (that is, equivocal or ambiguous terms), synonyms and “paronyms” (that is, pairs of words like ‘just’/‘justice’, ‘fire’/‘fiery’). In the very first sentence of the work, Aristotle says that equivocals, or homonyms, are things that have a name in common — **IN COMMON** — but the definition of that name they do not have in common. For instance, ‘bank’ when it means the side of a river, and ‘bank’ when it means a financial institution. The word or name is the same, but the definition is not. (That's of course not Aristotle's own example.)

Aristotle says that they have a common name. Now in the passage from Porphyry's *Exposition*, the “questioner” asks what the word ‘common’ means there in Aristotle's statement. But first, he says, “tell me in how many ways ‘common’ is said” (line 10).

So what we are going to get then is a kind of catalogue of various senses of the word ‘common’, and then we are going to see which one of those senses is the one Aristotle is using here.

Now notice: This is a quite different kind of context from the problem of universals. Porphyry is talking about having a single name in common, even though it's a single name with a variety of different senses. He's not talking about having some sort of metaphysical entity in common the way universals are supposed to be. Remember, I said that Boethius, as far as I know, was the first to apply what we're about to see to the notion of a universal.

Nevertheless, even though they're talking about different things, it seems pretty clear to me that Boethius knew this passage from Porphyry, or some similar passage in another author, and had it very much in mind when he wrote the text we've just analyzed from his *Commentary on Porphyry*.

Porphyry in this passage gives four senses in which things can be "common." First, he says, "that is called 'common' which is divided into parts, like a loaf [of bread], and wine if it is one of [the things that] are divided" (lines 11–13).

Now what do you suppose Porphyry means by that odd proviso, "if it is one of [the things that] are divided"? First of all, there's a textual problem here. The Greek has the active participle 'are dividing' here, rather than the passive participle 'are divided'. But I can make no sense of the active participle, and I suspect we just have to regard this as one more of the many corruptions of the text in this work.

But why add such a condition at all? I suspect the point here is to contrast wine, and perhaps bread earlier in the sentence (although it's not clear whether the condition is supposed to apply to both the bread and the wine or only to the wine) with the examples he's going to give of the second sense of being "common," in the next few lines. The examples there are "a horse" and "a slave." The examples listed under the first sense can be divided up without destroying them, whereas the examples listed under the second sense cannot. Cutting up a loaf of bread or sharing a loaf of bread is just good cheer all around. But cutting up a horse or a slave is another matter altogether; it completely ruins their usefulness.

I say I suspect Porphyry is making some such contrast here, I'm not entirely sure. In any event, it doesn't matter a whole lot for our present purposes. However it turns out notice that this first sense is exactly what Boethius is talking about in his own paragraph (15), being "common" by part by part, as a pizza is "shared" by all those who take a slice. Universals, if there are any, are not common in that way.

Second, Porphyry says, "That is called 'common' which is not divided into parts but is received by many for [their] use, like a horse or a slave [that is] common to many brothers" (lines 14–16). The examples, a horse and a slave, are exactly the ones Boethius uses for his own second way of being "common," in paragraph (16).

Now at first you might think that Porphyry's second sense doesn't have anything to do with possessing something at different times, which is what Boethius is talking about. It looks as though all Porphyry is talking about here is something like the legal notion of "joint ownership" ("common to many brothers," he says). On the other hand, perhaps the words "for their use" are important. Only one person at a time can actually use the slave or the horse. Well, maybe, but that's not particularly plausible. Nevertheless, the word I have translated here as 'received' is the Greek παραλαμβάνόμενον (see n. 5 of the Porphyry text), a word often used in the context of inheritance, so that whatever Porphyry himself may have meant, this text could easily have suggested the notion of temporal succession to Boethius.

Oddly, Boethius omits Porphyry's third sense of being "common." In this third sense, Porphyry says, "that is called 'common' which is in someone's possession beforehand and, after being used, is returned to common [ownership]" (lines 16–18). This is perhaps not altogether clear. In Porphyry's second sense, as we have seen, what is "common" is passed from one individual to another, like for instance an inheritance or a horse or slave, whereas in his third sense the predominant notion does seem to be one of "joint or common ownership," which is to be distinguished from actual possession and use. He gives the examples of the public baths and the theater or assembly (lines 18–19). The idea here seems to be that even if no one is actually in the public baths at a given time, they are still "common" — they are still public. And the public theater belongs to everyone, even if no one is actually there at the moment and no performance is actually going on. On the other hand, if no one person actually has possession of a slave at a given time (one of the examples both Porphyry and Boethius give of the second sense), then he or she is simply not a slave then, and certainly not a slave "in common." A slave that's not owned just isn't a slave at all! And a wild horse, not owned by anyone, doesn't thereby become a public horse.

The distinction between (2) and (3) is perhaps a little hard to make out convincingly. It is easy, for example, to suppose a slave owned by a whole family, rather than by any one individual in the family, so that we can contrive the kind of "joint ownership" Porphyry seems to have in mind for his third sense in the case of slaves and horses too. In any event, the distinction Porphyry seems to intend between his second and third senses of being "common" is that in the second sense what is received is received from another individual rather than from the "common store," whereas the third sense allows the latter possibility as well.

That distinction is nuanced and subtle, and perhaps not altogether certain. And I suspect that's why Boethius ignores it and reduces Porphyry's four senses to three.

In any case, Porphyry's fourth and last sense once again uses the example of the theater or assembly. This is confusing, to be sure, since he had just used the very same example for his third sense. But here's what he says: In the fourth sense "that is called 'common' which, as a whole, comes undividedly into the use (see my remark above on sense (2)) of many simultaneously" (lines 19–20). And, with the same example of the theater — or as Boethius puts it, a "stage-play, or some spectacle" — this is exactly Boethius's third way of being "common" without being a universal (paragraph (17)).

The upshot, then, is that this well-known passage from Boethius's second commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge* is not altogether original with him, although he does seem to have been the first to apply these distinctions to the problem of universals, and to make the point that a universal is not supposed to be common in any of these ways.

The first thing I said wanted you to notice about this passage up through paragraph (19) in Boethius was that the argument is entirely metaphysical; the second thing is the parallel in Porphyry's *Exposition of the Categories*.

- (3) The third thing I want you to notice about this passage from Boethius — and the corresponding passage from Porphyry's *Exposition of the Categories* — is that, although the details are not at all alike, the passage is obviously reminiscent of, and probably inspired by, that part of Plato's *Parmenides* where he is struggling to explain how things participate in the Forms. As you may recall, in Plato's *Parmenides* Socrates is represented as a young man who has just come up with this neat theory of Forms, and is trying to defend it and explain it to Parmenides, who's not entirely convinced.

Now, recall, the Middle Ages did not have the text of the *Parmenides*. Nevertheless, here's part of the discussion (*Parmenides* 131^{a–b} — Parmenides speaks first):

Then each thing that partakes receives as its share either the form as a whole or a part of it? Or can there be any other way of partaking besides this?

No, how could there be?

Do you hold, then, that the form as a whole, a single thing, is in each of the many, or how?

Why should it not be in each, Parmenides?

If so, a form which is one and the same will be at the same time, as a whole, in a number of things which are separate, and

CONSEQUENTLY WILL BE SEPARATE FROM ITSELF.

Now think about that passage. In it we see the first two of Boethius's three requirements for a universal: that it be present as a whole and simultaneously to many things. (In fact, if you'll look at the last sentence of Boethius's paragraph (11), you'll find that these same two clauses are mentioned there — but not the third clause brought out later in paragraph (17). So there's a very close parallel there.)

We also see something else in this passage, and now I want to digress a bit on this.

What is still missing from Boethius's argument against universals? Well, what we still need is some reason that will persuade us that the three ways of being "common" that Boethius distinguishes—(i) part by part, (ii) as a whole but in succession, and (iii) as a whole and simultaneously, but in an external way that is not metaphysically constitutive—are the only ones there are, and that consequently there is nothing "common" to many things as a whole and simultaneously, in the metaphysically intimate way Boethius requires of a universal.

Or to put it another way, we still need to know more about this "metaphysical intimacy," by which, Boethius says, a universal is supposed to "be able to constitute and form the substance of the things to which it is common" (paragraph (18)).

Or, to push it back one step further, we still need to know why the plurality of things to which a universal is supposed to be common would infect the universal itself, so that it too would be a plurality, and not one thing — with the result that, since it is not one, it is not a being either.

The passage I have just read from Plato's *Parmenides* addresses this point in a way that I think will perhaps advance our understanding of the matter, although it won't settle it.

One of the objections nominalists frequently raise against universals is that they are metaphysically too strange, because they are supposed to be in two or more

places at once. I raised this objection myself when I was presenting the nominalist point of view at the beginning of this course, with my two pieces of chalk.

Realists frequently respond to this objection by saying that there simply isn't anything wrong with being in two places at once. Individuals cannot be in two places at once, or at least material individuals cannot, but universals are just the kind of thing that can be in two places at once. That's part of what it means to be a universal, and can hardly be used as an objection. To do so would amount to little more than saying that universals can't exist, because if they did, they would be universal.

The passage I just read you pushes the point a little further, I think, by telling us more about what is supposed to be wrong with being in two places at once.

Well, Plato says (speaking through the voice of Parmenides):

a form which is one and the same will be at the same time, as a whole, in a number of things which are separate, and consequently will be separate from itself.

The real problem, then, is that if the whiteness of this piece of chalk and the whiteness of that piece of chalk are one and the same universal whiteness, then that one entity is separated from itself. In fact, it is separated from itself quite literally, by a measurable distance.

To say that a thing is "separated from itself" sounds much stronger than merely saying that it is "in two places at once." To say that something is "separated from itself" begins to sound like some kind of violation of the Law of Identity, saying something is distinct from itself. But the Law of Identity presumably applies to everything, individuals and universals alike.

And this, of course, is exactly Boethius's claim. By being wholly in two separate things at once, a universal violates its own identity. It would be no longer one thing, but two.

Whether there really is some kind of logical principle involved here is a question that would require a further consideration. But it certainly looks like a stronger argument than just saying that the same thing would be in "two places at once" without explaining why that should be a problem.

If you are interested in pursuing the matter further, you may want to look at the "Course in the Box," Ver. **2.0**, Vol. 1, Ch. 31 ("Anselm's *Monologion* Discussion of How God Can and Cannot Be Said to Be in Space and Time").

Anselm is a late-eleventh century writer, whom we won't have occasion to discuss in this course, since he doesn't say much directly on the problem of

universals. In the passage I discuss in Ch. 31, Anselm wonders how, on the one hand, we can say God is everywhere (he is “omnipresent”), and he exists at all times changelessly, and yet, on the other hand, we also say that he is “outside space and time” entirely. How can we say both?

Although Anselm is not talking about universals, what he says there has obvious applications to the same problem in connection with universals. And it’s pretty interesting stuff.

Now, one thing you cannot say in reply to this argument in the *Parmenides* is that:

The one universal whiteness is not separated from itself in these two pieces of chalk. What is separated is this whiteness, the whiteness of this piece of chalk, this instantiation of the one universal whiteness — and what it is separated from is that whiteness, the whiteness of that piece of chalk, that instantiation of the one universal whiteness. The two instantiations are separated, yes, but the one universal whiteness is unaffected by this.

Why can’t you say this? Well, you can — but only by abandoning universals in the sense Boethius has just defined.

Back when I introduced the problem of universals, I said that the realist view held that when I look at the color of this piece of chalk and then look at the color of that piece of chalk, I see only one color, one whiteness. In other words, the one universal color is present in each of these two pieces of chalk in the metaphysically intimate way Boethius requires. It is an ingredient of the two pieces of chalk, it enters into their metaphysical make-up. And in that case, of course, it is separated from itself.

But, according to the response I just said you couldn’t give and still be a realist, this is no longer so. What enters into the metaphysical make-up of these two pieces of chalk is no longer the one universal whiteness, but rather two instantiations of one whiteness, individual whitenesses that are derived somehow from a common origin in that one whiteness.

Now, there may not be anything wrong with this theory — and in fact we’ll see versions of throughout the semester — but it’s no longer a realism, it’s a form of nominalism. The so called universal whiteness is no longer an ingredient in the metaphysical make-up of the two pieces of chalk. Rather, it is its instantiation that

plays that role. And its instantiations are just as particular, just as individual, as the two distinct pieces of chalk they help make up.

In other words, the so called one universal whiteness, by being removed from the two pieces of chalk, so that it no longer plays the role of a universal common structural ingredient but rather the quite different role of a common cause or ultimate origin, ceases to be a universal in the Boethian sense. On this theory, everything is particular. The one external, separated color whiteness is, to be sure, a kind of common cause of the particular colors of these two pieces of chalk, but a universal has to do more than that. The sun, after all is a kind of cause of all the life here on earth, but that doesn't make it a universal in the sense we've been discussing.

When we talked about the passage from Boethius, we said that the exact nature of the “metaphysical intimacy” Boethius required of a universal was something he left pretty much unspecified. Nevertheless, however it goes, it appears that on the theory we've just been discussing, the particular instantiations of the one, separated whiteness are much more “intimate” with their individuals than that separated whiteness is. They are what “enter into its metaphysical make-up,” they are “ingredients” of the finished product. It is not — although of course it has a role to play.

In short, insofar as on this view everything is particular, it is a nominalism, not a realism.

This brings me to the fourth point I want you to notice about the Boethian definition of a universal:

- (4) Plato was a nominalist, not a realist. Or at least the main strand of the Platonic theory, the “generally received” theory, is a nominalism, not a realism. Probably not the Theory of Forms in the *Parmenides*, in the passage we've just looked at, but certainly the Theory of Forms in the *Republic* and other dialogues — including an important passage we'll discuss in a moment.

Plato's usual view is exactly like the one I've just described: one whiteness, the Platonic Form, off in another realm of pure Being quite separate from this realm of Becoming down here, a separated Form that serves as a kind of cause of the individual whitenesses that enter into the metaphysical make-up of particulars. (See the handout “The Greek Background to Mediaeval Philosophy.”) On Plato's theory, then, everything is completely particular.

So the phrase ‘Platonic realism’ is a misnomer as applied to this theory, even though it is in common usage, and even though in a sense it is perfectly all right to use it. But if nominalism is the doctrine that says that everything that exists is completely particular or individual, that nothing real is shared or common in the way Boethius describes, then “Platonic realism” in its usual form is a nominalism, and that’s the end of that.

The first time I announced (in an earlier version of this class) that Plato was a nominalist, the class gasped in disbelief. It was amazing to watch how otherwise reasonable people, who had followed and were willing to accept everything we had done up to that point, everything that, taken together, entailed by the most rigorous logical inexorability, that Plato was a nominalist and not a realist, nevertheless simply refused to accept that conclusion. It was as if logic and rationality, and everything else, were but small prices to pay in order to be able to maintain at all costs the conviction that Plato was a realist. It was an astonishing display, but it actually happened.

Let’s practice saying it: Plato was a nominalist.
(See? It doesn’t hurt so bad.)

Digression

Now I’ve thought about this for a long time: Why is it that people are so stubborn about this?

Several years ago, I read a paper in the Medieval Studies Institute lecture series here on campus on the problem of universals. In the question and discussion period afterwards, a colleague of mine from another department — an accomplished scholar and a person for whom I have the utmost respect — just insisted that Thomas Aquinas believed in universals because he talks about Ideas in the mind of God, which serve as the patterns after which the things in this created world are fashioned.

Now’s there is perhaps a sense in which Aquinas does believe in universals (we’ll talk about that later in this course). But he doesn’t mean the Divine Ideas. After that discussion session, I thought: “Aquinas does believe in those things. He calls them Divine Ideas. Sometimes he calls them the genera and species of things. But he never calls them universals. So why do you?”

Now I said I’ve thought about this a lot recently, and I think I now understand better what is going on.

I think my colleague, like a lot of people, implicitly take a universal to be whatever it is that answers the so called “problem of universals.” And that’s not right. Universals are one answer to that problem, but not the only one. (If they were, then nominalists would turn out to believe in universals too, since they too think they have an answer to the problem, and all our distinctions would become hopelessly muddled.)

Now let’s be clear about exactly what the “problem of universals” is. At the beginning of this course, I described the problem as simply “Do universals exist or not?” But while that’s perfectly correct as far as it goes, I think we’re now in a position to go deeper.

The real motivation behind the question is this: How do we explain the undeniable fact that things seem to alike in certain respects? How do we account for what seem to be the “natural” groupings of things.

What I am saying, in other words, is that what gets our whole problem going is the epistemological factors that at the beginning of this course I said provided the pressure in favor of realism.

Think about it. The nominalist denies, on metaphysical grounds, the existence of the entities the realist believes in — these strange things that are somehow “shared” by or common to several things at once in the way we’ve seen Boethius try to make precise. But that’s not where the historical discussion begins. There would be nothing for the nominalist to deny unless someone else had affirmed the reality of universals to begin with.

So the structure of the whole discussion is like this: The problem begins by asking how we can account for the undeniable fact that some things seem to be like other things in various natural groupings. That fact provides the epistemological pressure behind realism, and the belief in universals as the answer to the question. Only then, as a second step, do nominalists appeal to certain metaphysical factors that lead them to deny the existence of the things the realists believe in, and — they hope — come up with an alternative and better explanation of the undeniable fact that got the whole things started.

In a word: You could in principle have realists without nominalists, but it is highly unlikely that you would ever have nominalists without realists.

End of Digression

Now let’s bring this back home. People’s generally stubborn insistence that Plato was a realist — and so was Aquinas and anyone else who ever talked about these

topics — is based, I think, on a combination of two things, one of which is legitimate and the other mistaken. The legitimate one, and something we can learn from, is the realization that the whole problem of universals from the very beginning is about how we are going to account for apparent natural groupings of things. The mistaken point is the implicit assumption that any answer to that question is going to count as a universal.

In short, while Plato's Forms, and medieval "Divine Ideas," are most certainly relevant to the problem of universals in the sense we've just been talking about, while they are most certainly answers to the problem of universals in that sense, they are not universals. They are not what we mean by "universals" in this class, and they are not what most other people mean by "universals" throughout the entire subsequent history of the problem.

Once again, when I say that Platonic Forms are not universals, and that Plato was a nominalist, it depends on where you look. There is the passage from the *Parmenides*, the one I read you a little while ago, where Plato describes the Forms as being "at the same time, as a whole, in a number of things which are separate."

And that certainly sounds pretty close to the Boethian definition of a universal (except that Boethius emphasizes the "metaphysical intimacy" more). In that passage, Plato no doubt really is a realist.

Nevertheless, the "generally received" Platonic doctrine, the main strand of his thinking, doesn't go like that at all.

For example, look at *Timaeus* 48e–53c. (READ IT. Here is a handout for the passage. The English translation there is the old Benjamin Jowett translation, which has been much criticized but is not bad, and has the virtue of being freely available. Nevertheless, I will use another translation in what follows.)

Recall, I said earlier that the Middle Ages possessed only part of the *Timaeus* in Latin translation. The part they did have ended with 53c, the very end of the passage I want to talk about now. The main use of the *Timaeus* in the Middle Ages came about only in the twelfth century, but it was available much earlier.

More or less the same doctrine we find in the *Timaeus* is also contained in Plato's *Seventh Letter* 342a–343c (if that is authentic). But it is not so clear or explicit there.

The *Timaeus* is Plato's account of the origin of the cosmos. At *Timaeus* 48e–53c, he discusses what he calls the Receptacle (= ὑποδοχή), or "the receptive."

Now we all know that in Plato, things in the sensible world are but pale imitations of the Forms. (See the earlier handout on "The Greek Background.") So we have two poles here: **(1)** the Forms, and **(2)** imitations of Forms.

We also know that, as early as the *Parmenides*, the exact nature of the relation between Forms and their imitations bothered Plato. I read you a short passage earlier from that discussion.

The theory of the Receptacle or the Receptive in the *Timaeus* is an attempt to work this out.

The Receptacle is, according to the analogy Plato develops in the *Timaeus*, like sealing wax, the sort of thing people used to use to seal envelopes. The Forms, on the other hand, are like the seal ring, a signet ring. The metaphor then is that, just as a seal ring leaves a number of distinct impressions in the wax, so too a Form leaves a number of distinct impressions in the Receptacle. The impressions are quite particular and individual. No one impression is shared or common. The Form is an individual too. It is “shared,” in a sense, but it is no more a universal than the seal ring is. It is “common” or “shared” only in the sense of being a “common cause,” a cause that has several distinct effects. It does not enter into the inner metaphysical structure of its products in the way the particular impressions of it do. To use the example I gave you a while ago, the Form is no more a Boethian “universal” than the sun is, which is likewise, after all, a cause of several effects at once.

At *Timaeus* 50c (near the beginning of the relevant passage), Plato says:

Its [= the Receptacle’s] nature is to be available for anything to make its impression upon.

The word translated ‘impression’ here is ἐκμύγειον, and is exactly the word used in Greek for impressions of a seal or signet ring.

Here then we see for the first time the seal ring metaphor. It is going to be very important for us. We will meet it time and again through this course, and it is used throughout the Middle Ages for all sorts of things — not all of them having directly to do with the problem of universals. (For example, is it also a central metaphor in Aristotelian epistemology.) Keep the metaphor in mind.

Note something here: Despite the Jowett translation, which uses the term ‘matter’ — for instance, at 50d and 50e — Plato himself nowhere uses the term ‘matter’ (in Greek, ὕλη). He calls it the Receptacle (ὑποδοχή). And when it comes to a question what this really is, Plato identifies the Receptacle with: space.

(See 52b. This is the “empty container” theory of space.)

Unfortunately, of course, the seal-ring metaphor doesn’t fit very well with the notion of space. It’s hard to stamp an impression on empty space.

Nevertheless, in the subsequent history of this passage, although the connections with space will always remain, it is the seal-ring analogy that is picked up and becomes the dominant feature of the passage. The talk about space comes to be viewed as just as metaphorical as the seal-ring metaphor itself.

When Chalcidius translated the first part of the *Timaeus* (through 53c) into Latin in the late third or early fourth century, and then wrote a commentary on it, Plato's Receptacle came to be interpreted not as space but rather as matter. (This had already happened in Plotinus, *Enneads*, II.4.) And this is the form in which this picture is transmitted down through the Middle Ages: The Forms leave their individual impressions stamped on matter.

Let me say one last thing about this seal-ring metaphor for now: It is a metaphor, not an argument. If it were an argument, the realist would no doubt object that, while the Forms may be individual in this picture, and the impressions may be individual, nevertheless the picture doesn't do without universals entirely, insofar as the relation of "causing" or "impressing" or "stamping" that holds between the Forms and the impressions seems to be a universal relation, shared by or common to the many instances of Forms' being impressed on matter.

But of course, the metaphor is not an argument, and was never meant to me. The nominalist might well reply: If you are realist enough to raise an objection like that, then you shouldn't be using my seal-ring metaphor to begin with; it simply doesn't apply to your theory. And if you are nominalist enough to use the metaphor, then you should be willing to use it again to account for the relations of impressing. In short, the situation here is exactly like the situation we saw earlier with Boethius's infinite regress argument about there being "no last genus" (paragraph (13)) — that is, "who gives up first?"

And, at this point, I want to give you another piece of assigned reading. It's a paper of mine called *The Warp and Woof of Metaphysics: How to Get Started on Some Big Themes*. (Distribute.) It's a kind of "grab-bag," of material I put together years ago in connection with a course on Thomas Aquinas. You probably won't be in a position yet to see why I'm raising certain points in it. But never mind. Read it and keep it handy as we go along. The considerations in that paper will become relevant at various points as we go along. For the present, there's an important discussion of the distinction between "Platonic"-style and "Aristotelian"-style metaphysics, of how the modern use of the term 'properties' is not the medieval one, of the seal-ring metaphor, and of this passage from the *Timaeus*.

Now let's return to Boethius. Everything we've said so far about the passage from his *Second Commentary on Porphyry's Isagoge* has been a kind of explication of and meditation on paragraphs (11)–(19): the preliminary arguments against universals. Let us now turn to the other side, and look at the argument for universals, p. 23 paragraphs (20)–(22) in *Five Texts*. We can treat this rather quickly, since we've now got a lot of the terminology and machinery in place.

If, as the previous arguments concluded, genera and species are not real, then it appears, Boethius says, that they must be pure fabrications of the mind. Or, as he puts it, generic and specific concepts are concepts taken from things, but (p. 23.20.3) “as the thing is not disposed.”

We form generic and specific concepts for the sake of dealing with external realities, but if there are no generic or specific entities those concepts have nothing answering to them on the side of reality. The objection to nominalism then is that it makes our concepts “false” and “empty.” They are not just arbitrary; they are outright distortions of reality.

Hence, we could have no real knowledge of the world, since our knowledge — or at least any that's going to be very important — proceeds in terms of general or common concepts. Thus, the argument against nominalism — and so for realism — is that without universals, we are left with insuperable epistemological difficulties.

Note that this is exactly what we should expect, given what I said at the outset: metaphysics is on the side of nominalists; epistemology is on the side of realists.

Now those are the preliminary arguments. Remember, I said that Boethius's discussion in this whole passage was constructed in a kind of rudimentary *quaestio*-form. That is, first we get arguments on the one side and then arguments on the other, and then we get the author's own view, which must of course address the preliminary arguments.

Boethius's own view begins on p. 23, in paragraph (23).

He says he is taking his solution from a certain “Alexander.” This is Alexander of Aphrodisias, the famous third-century AD commentator on Aristotle, and indeed

one of the three truly *all-time great* commentators on Aristotle.² (Note: This remark implies that there was at least some discussion of universals before Boethius.) How does the solution go?

At first, it may seem to you that there is a kind of studied ambiguity in the doctrine. In fact, I don't think there is. But that will come later. Let's approach this "solution" now in several passes.

On our **first pass**, we can say that the solution proceeds by adopting the nominalist alternative (so Boethius in the *Second Commentary on Porphyry* is a nominalist), the claim that genera and species do not subsist — and in fact are not real in any sense — but rather exist purely in the mind. The solution then goes on to reject the counterargument to this view, that it leads to skepticism. That is, Boethius denies that concepts formed from things "as the things are not disposed," as he puts it, need to be false and empty (distortions of reality). That depends on how they depart from the way things are disposed.

First, let's look at what Boethius means when he talks about a concept's being formed "as the thing is not disposed." Well, what would it mean for a concept to be formed "as the thing is disposed"? Let's try to explain it like this:

A concept can be regarded as a kind of mental picture or representation, and Boethius does so regard it.

Now, this "picture"-theory of concepts has been subjected to a lot of criticism and ridicule over the years. But it need not be held in any kind of naive and simple-minded way. Provided one is sophisticated enough about it, there need be nothing wrong with this theory. In particular, we can say that concepts are mental pictures without committing ourselves to a view that would confuse concepts with imagination images or fantasy images.

If a concept is a "picture" of an object in this way, then we will say that a concept is formed "as the thing is disposed" if and only if the concept is an exact picture or representation of the object. That is, it includes all and only what is included in the object itself. A concept is formed "as the thing is *not* disposed" if it fails to be like this.

Now, without worrying too much at this point about the details of this picturing relation, we can see that if a concept fails to be an exact picture of an object — that is, if it is formed "as the thing is not disposed" — this may come about in one (or both) of two ways:

² A wide old professor of mine in graduate school (Anton Pegis) once observed that, although there have been lots of very good commentators on Aristotle, there have been three and only three really *great* commentators: Alexander of Aphrodisias, Averroes, and Thomas Aquinas.

- (a) First, because of “composition,” as Boethius puts it (p. 23.24.4). For instance (his example), when we put together the concept of a horse and the concept of a man, to get the concept of a centaur. The resulting concept may include — and in this example does include — more than is included in any one real object (if centaurs are impossible), and for that matter than in any one possible object, and so the concept says too much. In that sense, it is formed as the thing (any thing) is not really disposed.

Actually, Boethius’s example of a centaur may not be well put, if you think about it. It seems to depend on taking a centaur to be a complete horse plus a complete man, rather than — as it is usually portrayed — something that is part man and part horse. But never mind, the basic idea is clear enough. Boethius is talking about the kind of concept that “departs” from reality by “saying too much.” If you don’t like the example of a centaur, take the example of a square-circle.

Concepts formed by “composition,” then, are a little like what Bertrand Russell called “knowledge by description” — the so called “knowledge” I have of something not by experiencing it directly but rather by contriving a kind of description of it, composed of several other concepts that I do get by directly experiencing what they are concepts of.

A concept that departs from reality in this way, Boethius says, is false and empty. Note: When Boethius calls a concept “false,” he is not talking about false judgment. He just means an “empty” or “non-denoting” or “vacuous” concept.

Concepts formed like this then are “false” by saying too much, so that they end up saying something that isn’t so.

Note that not all concepts formed by “composition” like this are “false and empty”; not all such concepts end up “saying too much” and so departing from reality. In Russell’s terminology, I can have “knowledge by description” of things that really do exist. (That’s the way I know Portland, Maine, for instance, since I’ve never been there.) But the point is that when I put concepts together like this, there is no guarantee that they won’t end up “saying too much” and so being “formed,” as Boethius says, “as the thing is not disposed” (any thing).

- (b) On the other hand, Boethius says, concepts may also be formed “as the thing is not disposed,” and so depart from reality, by what Boethius calls “division” or “abstraction” (p. 23.25.1). What we have here then is our first encounter with a theory of abstraction.

Concepts formed in this way, by “division” or “abstraction,” Boethius says, are never false or empty, even though they too in a sense depart from reality by leaving out certain things that are included in the real object.

For instance, I can form the concept of color without considering surface. I can treat them separately. And the concept I end up with by so doing, the concept of color, is a perfectly legitimate concept. There is nothing false or empty about it. There really are colors, after all, and the concept of color is really of them. So those concepts are not false and empty.

Let’s be clear about what Boethius is not doing here. He is not saying that the concept color-without-surface is not empty, because that concept is empty. There are no colors without surfaces. Boethius is not talking about a concept that includes only certain features of the object like this, and then positively excludes the rest. Instead, he is talking only about a concept that includes certain features of the reality and completely ignores the rest, has nothing to say about the rest.

In the terminology of the later Middle Ages, this is the difference between plain old abstraction, and what is called precision, or abstraction with precision (from Latin ‘*praescindere*’ = to cut off).

TAKE THIS SLOWLY. Here’s an example of the difference between these two kinds of abstraction. (It comes from Thomas Aquinas’s *On Being and Essence*.) Consider the term ‘body’. To say that something is a body is to say that it is a physical object. (Think back to the Porphyrian tree. The real definition of body was material substance.) In this sense, we can say that Socrates is a body. He is a very special kind of body, of course. He is alive (or was then), he reasons, and so on. But none of that is to deny that he is a body. When used in this sense, the term ‘body’ is said to be taken in abstraction, but not with precision. The other features of Socrates are not ruled out; they’re just not mentioned. This is the kind of thing Boethius is talking about, what he means by “division.”

Contrast this with what happens when we say that Socrates is a composite of a body plus soul plus various accidents. Here ‘body’ is taken with precision. ‘Body’ in this sense doesn’t just fail to mention the rest. It positively excludes the rest, so that if we want to bring them into the picture too, we must mention the other factors explicitly as distinct things to be added on from outside. This is not the kind of thing Boethius means by forming a concept by “division.”

‘Body’ is one of the few terms in English where the same word can be used both with and without precision like this. Usually we do it with concrete vs. abstract forms of the noun. Thus ‘man’ [concrete] vs. ‘humanity’ [abstract].) We can do it that way with ‘body’ in English too: ‘body’ vs. ‘bodyhood’ or something like that. But we don’t have to; we can use ‘body’ both ways. Furthermore, ‘body’ is

one of the even fewer English words like this where the corresponding Latin word — ‘*corpus*’, in this case — behaves exactly the same way! Aquinas uses the example in *On Being and Essence*. Nothing much rests on these oddities of the words ‘body’ and ‘*corpus*’, but it is important to keep in mind the distinction between abstraction with precision and abstraction without precision. Boethius is here talking only about what will later be called abstraction without precision.

Boethius’s own example of this (paragraph (26), and again in paragraph (29)) is of a geometrical line, which he says is present in and inseparable from a physical body. Yet the mind can “separate” it from the body and consider it apart from any consideration of the body, even though it cannot exist apart from the body. For example, we can do geometry!

For us — or for me, at any rate — that is rather an awkward example, since it seems to say that mathematical notions can be derived from sensation by abstraction. This will be a problem if you don’t think there are any absolutely straight lines (which is what Boethius is talking about) in physical nature, or any perfect circles or absolutely smooth surfaces. If they’re not really out there in physical nature, then they are not there to be abstracted from experience of physical nature. Nevertheless, Boethius’s view here is basically an Aristotelian theory of mathematical objects. I happen to find it a not very plausible view, which is why I gave you the example of ‘body’ — and of color vs. surface — rather than Boethius’s own example of a geometrical line.

Boethius thinks our generic and specific concepts — and in fact all our basic general concepts — are formed by “division” or “abstraction” in the sense we’ve just described. (We also have concepts formed by composition, of course, but they are not “basic”; they are derived, and we’re not talking about them for now.) Our basic general concepts all depart from reality, and in that sense are formed “as the thing is not disposed.” But they are not false or empty. They say nothing false; they just don’t say the whole truth.

So far, so good. What we have here is a kind of rudimentary theory of abstraction. There are no universal entities out there in reality. There is no humanity in general; there is only the humanity of Socrates and the humanity of Plato. But the mind can observe these humanities and disregard — or “divide out,” to continue Boethius’s “division” talk — their differences, so that what it ends up with is a general or universal concept of humanity that is based on and grounded in reality, and does not falsify reality.

I will say more about the virtues or vices of such views later on. But for the present, let’s listen to Boethius some more, because he’s not done. And things now begin to get terminologically rather confusing in Boethius’s text. Or at least they’re confusing if you’re not careful.

For example, at the end of the whole passage, when he is finally answering Porphyry's three questions, he says in response to the first question (p. 25.34) that genera and species do subsist after all. In reply to the second question (paragraph (35)) he says they subsist in themselves (whatever that adds) and are incorporeal. He doesn't quite go on to say they are in the individuals they are genera and species of, which is what Porphyry's third question asked. He only says they are "joined" to individuals. We'll see in a moment why he's being non-committal.

But it doesn't make any difference whether he says it here, because he does say it explicitly at the top of p. 25, at the beginning of paragraph (31): "And so these things exist IN singulars, but are thought of as universals." (This sentence becomes a kind of slogan later on in the Middle Ages.)

But how can all this be? I thought we just said Boethius accepted the nominalist view, that such universals do not subsist. And if you look through the passage as a whole, it is clear that he does accept this. So what is going on?

In order to understand this, you must first realize that Boethius is using the term 'genus' here for two quite distinct kinds of things, and so too the term 'species'. I'll explain in a moment why this is not just irresponsible equivocation. But for the present, let's just look at what those two quite distinct kinds of things are.

When Boethius says genera and species do subsist or exist, he is not saying that something common or universal subsists or exists. The antirealist arguments at the beginning of the passage are correct here, Boethius thinks. There is no humanity in general, no animality in general. On the other hand, we do have a humanity of Socrates, and a humanity of Plato, and likewise an animality of Socrates and an animality of Plato. And there is a perfectly good sense in saying that Socrates's humanity is his species or specific nature, whereas his animality is his genus or generic nature. In that sense, then, genus and species do subsist or exist, but they are not universal or common; there is nothing shared here.

Boethius goes on, immediately after the sentence about how genera and species exist in individuals but are thought of as universals, to say (lines 2–4 of paragraph (31), at the top of p. 25):

Species is to be regarded as nothing else than the thought gathered from the substantial likeness of individuals that are unlike in number. Genus, on the other hand, is the thought gathered from the likeness of species.

(The last occurrence of the word 'species' there is in the plural.)

In other words, the common concept of the species has no common thing corresponding to it in reality; what corresponds to the concept “humanity” is several things, all the individual, private humanities of Socrates and Plato and others, which are alike and yet have nothing in common. So the concept is not empty and false. It is just that the correspondence with reality is not one-to-one; it is one-to-many.

Notice the terminological shift in this passage at the beginning of paragraph (31): First he says genera and species exist in singulars or individuals (line 1). Here he is talking about the individual humanities and animalities of Socrates and Plato, and calling those things the species and genera. Then, in the very next words (lines 2–4), he turns around and says species must be considered to be a kind of thought. Here he is talking about the general concept.

Now, this may look like a hopeless terminological muddle. But in fact, it isn’t. What seems to be going on here is that Boethius is implicitly using a basically Aristotelian theory of knowledge — which is not inappropriate, since after all he is commenting on the *Isagoge*, which is an introduction to Aristotle’s *Categories*.

Now one of the most basic and fundamental features of Aristotelian epistemology is that the knower is supposed to take on the form of the known. (See the handout “The Greek Background to Mediaeval Philosophy.”) This doctrine may sound absolutely wild to you, but Aristotle means what he says. When I have sense-knowledge of an object, for instance, it is based on a sense-impression caused in me by the action of an object on my sense-organ. Aristotle even explicitly uses the “seal-ring” metaphor, which we have already seen in a different context in Plato. When the ring is stamped into the wax, it leaves there an impression of itself, which formally speaking (that is, from the point of view of the form), is exactly identical with the ring itself — or at least with that portion of the ring that does the impressing. The form is the same, although of course the matter is not. The ring is gold or brass or whatever, but the impression is just wax. So too, the sense-power of the soul takes on the form of its object, although not the matter. The form that inhered in the matter in the external object now inheres in the sensitive faculty of the soul, which therefore acts like matter. As a result, we are “informed,” and gain “information.” (That’s where this terminology comes from.)

So too at the level of concept-formation. General concepts are formed, according to Aristotle, when the mind takes one of these sense-impressions, and does something to it to remove the features that make it an impression of this particular object and no other. In short, it “removes the individuating conditions,” as later authors will put it. What it ends up with then is a universal concept. This is Aristotle’s theory of “abstraction,” which is very much like the theory we’ve just seen in Boethius.

Just as the sense-impression was formally identical with the original object, so too for the universal concept. It's just not formally identical with the whole of the original object, but only with that part or aspect of it that is preserved or left after the mind gets done removing the individuating conditions.

If you are not familiar with this doctrine — and you may well not be — I suggest you consult the handout on “The Greek Background to Mediaeval Philosophy,” but especially (Distribute) “Aristotelian Epistemology and Its Arabic Developments” (from Ver. 2.0 of “The Course in the Box,” with mysterious coding in the text), and the correlative texts of Aristotle (distribute) “Passages from Aristotle’s *De anima*” (from “The Course in the Box,” Ver. 3.0). Do get familiar with the doctrine one way or another, because it is going to be very important. We will have more to say about it later on.

Now it's crucial to realize that when Aristotle says the universal concept is formally identical with the object, or at least with the conceived part of the object, he means identical. It is not just that one is like the other, that the one is a kind of duplicate of the other. No, they are identical. That is, they are one thing, not two things.

There may well be a question about just what kind of “identity” Aristotle has in mind here. It's not silly, although it's not exactly what we normally mean by “identity” either. (But it's also not that far from it, either. If you want to find out more about this, look at my paper “Degrees of Being, Degrees of Unity: Aquinas on Levels of Reality,” in the “Articles (Bibliography)” subfolder on the “Resources” page of our Oncourse site. That paper is really about Aquinas, but it also has something to say about this matter.) In any case, it's clear that Aristotle means “identity” in a strong enough sense that no inference is needed from the concept to the object. In other words, by insisting on the identity of concept and object Aristotle can guarantee the objectivity of knowledge. With Aristotle, you do not have the kind of problem Descartes had, starting with a concept or idea in his mind, and then wondering whether it was legitimate to infer from that idea to the existence of an object represented by it. For Aristotle, you don't have to infer. The concept puts the mind into direct contact with the object, insofar as the concept just is the object — or at least that aspect of the object that is known by the concept. So the objectivity of knowledge is guaranteed for Aristotle. (He, of course, has the opposite problem: How can we ever make mistakes? That one was easy for Descartes, whose whole philosophy started from the fact that we make mistakes sometimes.)

All this can of course be said without supposing that Aristotle's purpose in holding this view was to avoid Cartesian problems. That would be hopelessly anachronistic. But whatever his motivation was, his theory has this consequence.

That's enough for the present about Aristotle's epistemology. (For the rest, see the references I gave you a moment ago.) You are now in a position to see that, if this is what Boethius had in mind — and I think it is, since after all Boethius was pretty familiar with Aristotle — then he can, quite legitimately and with impunity — i.e., without equivocation — use the terms 'genus' and 'species' both for the universal concept in the mind, and also for the individual correlates in reality. There is no ambiguity at all, even though there is some danger of confusion if you don't realize what is going on.

This then is Boethius's answer to the problem of universals in his *Second Commentary on Porphyry*. It adopts a basically nominalist metaphysics, but then argues that this does not compromise human knowledge. The mechanism that makes this possible is a theory of abstraction, conceived of as a kind of "filtering" or separating out — what Boethius calls "division." The "individuating conditions" are filtered out, leaving the pure universal concept.

This is a common theory in the Middle Ages — and for that matter even today. It is sometimes called "moderate realism"; it's just "realist" enough to safeguard human knowledge, but not realist enough to get you into metaphysical difficulties. It's nominalist enough to avoid the metaphysical difficulties of more robust forms of realism, and yet not so nominalist that it wrecks any possibility of general knowledge of reality. Theories like this are also called "conceptualism" by some people.

Frequently the most astonishing claims are made for this kind of theory. As we shall see, Thomas Aquinas had a theory very much like it, at least on the usual interpretation of Aquinas, and so the theory has come to have all the authority that Thomas Aquinas had — at least until the 1960's — in Catholic intellectual circles, and so among the majority of historians of medieval philosophy for the last forty years or so.

People who accept this view as a successful solution to the problem of universals describe the alternative views in terms verging on libel. On the one hand, we have the extreme realists, ultra-realists, or naïve-realists. On the other hand, we have the nominalists who are so beyond the pale that we don't even have a special term of abuse reserved for them, even though they were probably responsible for the destruction of the entire medieval synthesis, and are suspected, at least, of secretly bringing about the Reformation. By contrast, the kind of theory we have just looked at is a "moderate realism," and therefore has all the middle-of-the-road virtues of the Golden Mean.

As you read around in the literature, you really will find this kind of talk a lot. You should learn to expect it, and also learn not to take it too seriously. For the fact is, this kind of “moderate realist” theory has severe — and, I frankly think, crippling — philosophical difficulties of its own.

The main problem is that the theory can’t seem to decide whether it’s a nominalism or a realism, whether universals really exist or not. When the theory is speaking in the metaphysical tone of voice, it sounds as nominalist as they come. There is nothing shared or common out there in reality.

But when it comes to epistemology, the same theory sounds pretty strongly realist. Our general concepts do have a basis in reality.

The crucial device that gives this theory its apparent plausibility is of course the doctrine of abstraction. It’s what is really doing all the work in the theory. But as long as “abstraction” is thought of — as it is in Boethius — as a matter of filtering out or stripping away the individuating conditions, the theory is hopeless.

The whole point of the “filtering out” metaphor — the “dividing,” as Boethius puts it — is that what you end up with is something that was really there to begin with. It was just all covered over with these “individuating conditions.” So, if what you end up with as the result of this process of filtering is a universal, that universal must have been present at the outset in the original object. And that’s not nominalism; that’s realism.

As long as abstraction is thought of as a matter of uncovering the universal by disregarding its individuating conditions, we are committed to the view that the universal is after all there to be uncovered. Otherwise, abstraction would fail!

So “moderate realism” — at least until it gives us an altogether different account of “abstraction” — is an unsuccessful theory. It solves the problems of realism by simply speaking like a nominalist whenever they arise, and it solves the problems of nominalism by speaking like a realist whenever they arise. This kind of prestidigitation might create the illusion of success for some people. But we can surely see through that.

No, if this kind of theory is going to have a hope of really working, and not just of fooling the people who are already committed to believing it, we’re going to have to come up with some notion of concept formation — call it “abstraction” if you want — that is not based on a “filtering” or “subtracting” or “separating” metaphor.

There is a philosophical task for you, quite apart from any history lessons you may learn in this course.

Now let's finish up with our text.

At the very end of the entire passage (paragraph (37)), Boethius makes a truly astonishing remark.

He has just observed (paragraph (36)) that Plato and Aristotle disagree over the answer to Porphyry's third question. Aristotle says that genera and species (although not universal genera and species, according to Boethius) are in individuals, whereas Plato says they are separated — that is, they are the Platonic Ideas or Forms. (And remember, Platonic Forms are no more universal in Boethius's sense than what Aristotle is talking about.)

After noticing this difference, Boethius says that he has followed Aristotle here (through his commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias) not because he thinks this theory is true, but because he is commenting on a text, the *Isagoge*, that is supposed to introduce the reader to Aristotle's *Categories*, so that it is his job to be Aristotelian about it.

All right, now what are we to make of this? Does Boethius mean that he doesn't believe a word of all the stuff he has just been feeding us, and that he's really a crypto-Platonist — or even a realist (GASP)?

Well, if you look at some of Boethius's other works, where is he speaking in his own right, and is not operating under the constraints of a faithful commentator, you can piece together another view that is somewhat more Platonic than the one we have just been looking at. In fact, you can piece together at least two views from these other passages.

Let's look at some of these passages, then. In particular, I want you to look at the passages contained in the section *Boethius: Two Texts from His Theological Tractates* in the *Notes and Texts* (pp. 49–53). And let me warn you: We're going to be going over these texts quite closely, and extracting from them theories you might suspect the texts can't really bear. But don't be deceived: The theories I may seem to be straining to get out of these texts are all theories we will see again in the twelfth century, and in fact see again in discussions of and commentaries on these very passages.

All right, now we've already talked about the first passage to some extent, from the *Contra Eutychen*. This is the passage where Boethius makes the distinction between 'subsisting' and 'substanding', and tells us they are used to translate two

distinct Greek terms in a way that in fact he doesn't stick to in his commentary on Porphyry.

In this first passage, from the *Contra Eutychen*, we get a picture of an individual substance, to which accidents can be added and from which they can be removed. Substances don't need accidents, remember, even though in fact they have them. (That was the difference between “substanding” and “subsisting.”)

This is a basically Aristotelian picture. The idea is that accidents are ontologically parasitic kinds of things; they depend on their substances. The substances are the basic things, and don't depend on accidents.

Given this, let's approach things by looking at the structure of an individual, and asking ourselves what it takes to be an individual for Boethius.

In effect, what we are asking now is how to make that last step on the Porphyrian tree (if we include individuals), the jump from the *infima species*, the last species “man,” to the individuals Socrates and Plato. At every previous step on the tree, we made the transition to the next lower step by adding a difference — or a specific difference, as it is sometimes called — to the genus. What do we have to add now to the lowest species “man” to get to the level of the individual?

In effect, what we are looking for now is the so called “principle of individuation.” We might also call it an “individual difference,” after an analogy with the notion of a specific difference. (And in fact, later on it is called this.)

What is it then that narrows down or contracts (as they say — get used to this terminology) the species to yield the individual? This is the first time we've dealt with this issue head on.

On this question, there are at least two views implicit in the *Theological Tractates*.

These two views may or may not in the end amount to the same thing in Boethius himself. But, because of what he says here and doesn't say there, and vice versa, they lend themselves to being interpreted and developed in radically different ways into quite different theories, and were in fact so interpreted and developed by subsequent authors, as we shall see in the twelfth century.

The first theory is one that can be derived by juxtaposing what Boethius says here in the *Contra Eutychen* (Text 1 of *Two Texts*) with what he says at the end of the passage I've quoted there from the *De trinitate* (the end of Text 2, lines 123–135). The other theory comes from a slightly earlier passage in the same work (Text 2, lines 74–88).

Let's look at these two theories in turn. As a preliminary, I want to make a relevant digression on the phrase 'principle of individuation':

A number of quite distinct questions are often treated under the heading 'the principle of individuation', or 'the problem of individuation'. And it will be important to keep the distinctions clear in our discussion of the passages from the *Theological Tractates*. (And for that matter throughout this course.)

There are at least three questions that might be called the "problem of individuation." To begin with:

- (a) What is it that makes something an individual? What is it that makes Socrates an individual, and what is it that makes Plato an individual, rather than, say, a universal, or rather than, say, a genus or species? Note that these are not the same question. So, in effect, we can subdivide this first question. Even nominalists, who say everything is singular and nothing is universal, will distinguish individuals from genera and species. But, quite apart from that, there's another question:
- (b) What is it that makes an individual the individual it is? That is, what makes Socrates Socrates, and what makes Plato Plato?

It's easy to see that these two questions are not the same, since they might well have different answers. For example, you might think that what makes something an individual — that is, what answers question (a) — is being in space and time. (If I understand him, Reinhardt Grossmann, who used to teach in this department, held and no doubt continues to hold this view.) Now being in space and time is something that is equally true of all individuals (if you believe this theory); it is a universal feature, you might want to say, of all individuals. And therefore being in space and time cannot be what makes Socrates Socrates — that is, it cannot be the answer to (b) — if what makes Socrates Socrates is some feature or characteristic such that, when it is present in something, it makes that something Socrates. For we just said that being in space and time was a feature common to all individuals, so that all individuals would end up being Socrates.

So (a) and (b) are different questions, because they might very well have different answers. Whether they do have different answers or not is a different story. But even if they have the same answer, they remain distinct questions, and we should be aware of the distinction.

There is a third question too:

- (c) What is it that distinguishes one individual from another?
That is, what makes Socrates distinct from Plato?

(Note: This is not the epistemological question what allows us to draw the distinction, but rather the metaphysical question what makes them distinct.)

It is easy to see that this question is different from the other two. For example, suppose only one individual existed. (If you believe in the traditional doctrine of creation, according to which God created absolutely everything besides himself, and furthermore didn't have to create what he did, or indeed create anything at all, then you are committed to saying that this hypothetical case is a possible one. If God had created nothing at all, he would have been the only individual — and in fact the only entity — around.)

Now you can sensibly ask about that situation what it is that makes that sole individual an individual, and you can also sensibly ask what it is that makes it the individual it is. But you probably can't sensibly ask in that case what it is that distinguishes that individual from others, since by hypothesis there aren't any others for it to be distinguished from. So since questions (a) and (b) have answers in that situation, whereas question (c) does not, plainly question (c) is a different question from questions (a) and (b).

You might not think it's so clear that question (c) doesn't have an answer in that hypothetical situation. But in any case, it is clear that questions (a) and (b) do. So, since (a) and (b) clearly do have answers, whereas (c) does not so clearly have an answer, once again (c) has got to be different from (a) and (b). And of course questions that are distinct in one set of circumstances remain distinct questions even in circumstances where they might have the same answer.

So questions (a)–(c) are three distinct questions. Depending on our metaphysical theory, they might or might not have the same answer. But in any case we need to keep clear not only about how we answer those questions but also about just exactly which question it is we're asking.

All these questions are often treated together indiscriminately under the heading 'the problem of individuation'. In order to keep them distinct in our minds, let's agree to call them by different names. (a) The first question, what it is that makes something an individual rather than, say, a universal, or rather than a genus or species, we will call "the problem of individuality." (b) The second question, what it is that makes an individual the individual it is, we will call "the problem of identification." (Or perhaps "the problem of individual identification" would be better, since presumably we could ask a similar question about universals too: What is it that makes a universal the universal it is? What is it that makes a genus the genus it is? But let's not worry about that for now.) (c) The third question,

what it is that distinguishes one individual from another, we will call “the problem of differentiation” or “the problem of distinction.”

I don’t mean to make too much out of this terminology, or to suggest that this is the only — or even the best — way to set up the issues. What I want to stress here is only that we should be as clear as we can about exactly what we are asking and what we are not.

Armed with these distinctions, then, let’s now turn back to the texts from the *Theological Tractates* and once again ask how get from the level of the *infima species* down to individuals. In Text 1 (see *Notes and Texts*), the passage from the *Contra Eutychen*, we get the view that individuals are subsistents — that is, they don’t need accidents in order to exist. Nevertheless, they have accidents anyway, and so we also call them not just subsistents but also substances. On the other hand, genera and species, according to Text 1, cannot do this. (Look again at lines 47–52.) We’ve seen this much before.

And that’s basically all Boethius says about it in this passage. But it’s enough to tell us something. The last step on the Porphyrian tree, the step from the lowest species to individuals, is the step that introduces the ability to have accidents, even though of course they’re not needed.

On the other hand, what it is that accounts for this new ability we don’t yet know. That is, is it the accidents themselves that do this, so that we have the doctrine of “individuation by accidents” that I mentioned briefly some time ago? Or is it something else that allows individuals to have accidents? Text 1 is totally silent on that point.

For this, let’s turn to Text 2, from the *De trinitate*, and in particular to lines 123–35 at the end of the passage.

The main point of these lines is to distinguish forms from what Boethius there calls “images.” A form, for Boethius, is in effect a Platonic Form. But with a qualification.

Boethius did not believe in the Forms in the original Platonic sense (either the realist sense of the *Parmenides* or the nominalist sense of the *Timaeus* and other dialogues). He doesn’t believe in them because they would conflict with the doctrine of creation, according to which God created absolutely everything other than himself. In the original Platonic version of the theory of Forms, of course, the Forms were uncreated, eternal things. So, as it stands, that theory is unacceptable to Boethius, who believed in the doctrine of creation, just as it was

unacceptable to lots of other philosophically-minded believers before Boethius — people such as St. Augustine, and the important Jewish writer from around the turn of the Christian Era, Philo of Alexandria (= Philo the Jew).

Philo was apparently one of the first people to make an important move in the history of Platonism: He moved the Platonic Forms into the mind of God, where they became Divine Ideas. As a result of this move, everything in this world is still made after the patterns found in the Forms (now “divine ideas”), just as they were for Plato. The Forms are still uncreated and eternal — just as uncreated and eternal as God himself. They are his uncreated and eternal thoughts. All this is compatible, however, with saying that God created everything besides himself.

This move was picked up by people like St. Augustine, and through him Boethius and pretty much the entire Middle Ages. Plotinus has a somewhat similar doctrine, although it isn’t quite the same (and, anyway, he isn’t worried about the doctrine of creation in the way Augustine and Boethius are). He’s also later than Philo by a couple of centuries.

You should get used to the terminology here: Whenever you see the term ‘idea’ in the Middle Ages, it can mean one of two things and nothing else. It can mean either Platonic Ideas in the original sense. And when that is what an author means, he almost always says so explicitly. Or else it can mean a “divine idea” — and that is the usual sense. The term ‘idea’ never in the Middle Ages just means “concept,” in the sense in which, for instance, Descartes talks about ideas in our minds.

It helps to keep this in mind. Otherwise, you’ll find a lot of strange discussions that you won’t understand. In the *Summa theologiae*, for instance, Thomas Aquinas asks “Whether there are ideas?” And at first you might think: “What a strange question to ask.” It is even stranger when you read what he actually says in that question, and it doesn’t appear to be addressing at all the question you thought he was asking. The truth is, of course, that he is talking about divine ideas in the sense I’ve just described.

This theory of divine ideas was held virtually unanimously in the Middle Ages — although William of Ockham in the fourteenth century rejected the theory. (Actually, he didn’t reject it; he just interpreted it in a way that amounted to making it say the direct opposite of what it originally meant.)

There is of course a problem for this theory: How can the plurality of Forms or Ideas be made compatible with the unity and simplicity of God? That was a problem much discussed, and some pretty sophisticated things came to be said about it. For more on the doctrine of divine ideas, you may want to look at “The Course in the Box,” Ver. 2.0, Vol. 1, Ch. 19.

Now this is what Boethius has in mind when he talks about a “form” in lines 123–35 of the second passage from the *Theological Tractates*. God himself is a form, and his ideas are forms. (In fact, they are the same form — which is what gives rise to the problem I just mentioned.)

Now according to these lines, forms are to be contrasted with what Boethius there calls “images,” even though he suggests that sometimes we speak loosely of the latter as forms too. (In fact, Boethius himself does this sometimes.)

What are these “images”? Well, an image is an imitation of a form. Furthermore, it is found in matter.

What we have then in Text 2 is in effect Plato’s seal-ring picture all over again — although Boethius doesn’t explicitly use the metaphor here. The forms are the Platonic Forms, now divine Ideas, and the images are the impressions of those forms in matter, which, recall, is what Plato’s Receptacle became. Listen to what Boethius says (lines 130–33):

From the forms [= divine ideas] that are outside matter come the forms [loosely speaking] that are in matter and make a body. We misuse the others [that is, the ones in matter], which are in bodies, when we call them “forms” while they are images. For they are made like [the Latin is ‘adsimilantur’ = are assimilated to] those that are not constituted in matter [= the divine ideas].

So far, so good. But now, to get back to our point, what does all this have to do with our question, which was how we get from an *infima species* to the individuals under that *infima species*.

Well, remember where we left off after Text 1: We had learned that the difference between genera and species, on the one hand, and individuals, on the other, was that the latter had accidents (although they don’t need them) whereas the former don’t have them. But we did not yet know what it was that accounted for this difference.

If we look around at the end of *Text 2*, we get what appears to be an answer to that question: it’s matter that accounts for the difference. Look at lines 124–27 (he’s talking about God):

Neither can it [= God] be a subject. For it is a form, and forms cannot be subjects. When another form, like humanity [NOTE: a species], is a subject for accidents [that is, when it appears to be

so, as we'll see in a moment], it does not take on accidents insofar as it is, but insofar as matter is subjected to it.

But this still isn't put quite right, and Boethius goes on in the very next lines to correct himself. So far, it sounds as if the form or divine Idea itself takes on accidents insofar as matter is subjected to it — that is, insofar as it is stamped on matter. But that's not quite right, as he now explains (lines 127–28):

For, as long as matter, subject to humanity, takes on any accident, humanity itself appears to take it on.

Aha! So it's really the matter that the accidents inhere in. He goes on (lines 128–30):

But a form that is without matter cannot be a subject, and cannot be in matter. For it would not be a form but an “image.”

And then we get the rest of the passage, which I've already gone through, where he explains the difference between forms and images.

OK, now let's put all this together. So far from this second text, we've learned that accidents inhere in matter, not in separated forms. From Text 1 we know that it's the ability to have accidents that distinguishes individuals from species and genera. So it's matter that allows us to have accidents in the first place, and it's the ability to have accidents that gives us individuals rather than species or genera. So it would appear then that matter plays an important role in giving us individuals, and so is in some sense a principle of individuation.

But if matter is a principle of individuation, in which of the senses we distinguished earlier is it such a principle?

Well, at first glance, matter would appear to be a principle of individuation in the first of those senses: It is what we called a principle of individuality, what makes something an individual as distinct from a universal, or as distinct from a species or genus. On the Porphyrian tree, you make the last step, from the lowest species to individuals, by adding matter, which gives you the ability to have accidents.

(As we'll see in a few moments — p. 83 below — one can argue different ways about this.)

But you might also argue that matter is a principle of individuation in the second of the senses we distinguished earlier: It is a principle of individual identification, what makes the individual the individual it is. After all, what makes Socrates this individual and Plato that other individual is just the fact that all the “images” that

make up Socrates have been stamped on this particular glob of matter, while the images that make up Plato are stamped on that glob of matter. After all, as far as their essential features are concerned, Socrates and Plato are exactly alike. And as far as their accidental features are concerned — well, you need matter in order to have accidents at all. And if Socrates and Plato have different combinations of accidents, they are going to need different globs of matter for the accidents to inhere in. So it appears that matter is really doing all the work here.

Similar considerations might also lead one to argue that matter is the principle of individuation in the third sense we distinguished, a principle of differentiation: what makes one individual distinct from another.

Does this mean that matter is the principle of individuation in all three of the senses we have distinguished? It looks like it, but we'd have to think about this a lot more before we were in a position to say we've got this sorted out correctly.

For example, you might well ask: How can matter be a principle of differentiation, when in order for Socrates to be distinct from Plato, the specific human nature has to be combined with Socrates's accidents in one blob of matter, and with Plato's accidents in a distinct blob of matter. Matter can't be the whole story, since having matter isn't by itself going to distinguish one blob of matter from another.

In any case, there's nothing surprising about calling matter a principle of individuation. After all, Aristotle himself says this. See, just to cite a few places: *Metaphysics* v.6 1016^b32; vii.8 1034^a5–8; vii.10 1035^b30; x.3 1054^a33; x.9 1058^b5–25; xii.8 1074^a33.

To summarize this then, how do we get an individual — say, Socrates? Well, we start with some matter, and then impress on that matter the images of certain divine ideas or “forms,” like stamping a seal-ring into wax.

First we have the image of substantiality, then the image of corporeality, of life, of sensitivity, or rationality, and finally various accidental images — all stamped on top of one another in the same glob of matter. (Notice I've just descended the Porphyrian tree from top to bottom.)

Now, in a sense, the forms might be called the true genera and species on this theory. (Recall from Text 1, from the *Contra Eutychen*, genera and species only subsist, they don't substand accidents.) These forms are “common” by way of being common exemplars or paradigms, just as the one seal-ring is the common source of all the several impressions it makes. But the forms (the divine Ideas) are not universals in the sense defined in the *Commentary on Porphyry*, since they're

outside the metaphysical structure of individuals; what's in the structure of individuals on this theory is not the forms but the images. Everything on this theory is particular, just as it was in Plato's *Timaeus*.

Recall, how, at the end of the discussion in the *Commentary on Porphyry* (p. 25.36), Boethius said that Plato and Aristotle disagreed over Porphyry's third question, and that while Aristotle held that genera and species are in individuals, Plato held that they are separated. In the terminology of the *De trinitate* that we've just seen, this in effect means that Plato calls the forms (= Divine Ideas) genera and species, while Aristotle calls the images genera and species, and completely ignores — or worse, rejects — the theory of Forms.

The kind of theory we've just seen will be a very common one in the Middle Ages. It all goes back to Plato's discussion of the Receptacle in the *Timaeus*, and his use of the seal-ring metaphor. For that reason, I will call this theory and its variations the “seal ring theory.”

Now for a little more terminology. The impressions of the seal-ring Boethius calls images. Chalcidius, the translator of and commentator on the *Timaeus*, calls them native forms (*formae nativae* = *inborn forms*). He also calls them impressed forms. This last term, ‘impressed forms’, will be picked up again in the twelfth century and used by one Gilbert of Poitiers, whom we will meet later on.

The terminology will vary. But the theory itself, the basic picture, is a quite common one. So get it firmly fixed in your mind. It's the “seal-ring” theory. It has its roots in Plato's *Timaeus*, but in the Latin tradition we find it first in Boethius's *Contra Eutychen* and the end of the passage I've given you from the *De trinitate*.

Now there are lots of questions one might ask about this theory, and let's face some of them now.

- (1) First, I just said that on this theory, matter is a principle of individuation in at least some sense. On the other hand, I also said that on this theory, everything is individual; there are no universals. This theory is a form of nominalism.

Now you might well ask: What sense does it make to talk about individuation at all in a nominalist framework? We don't mean that there is something you add to a universal to narrow it down, to “contract” it, as they will later say, to an individual. There are no universals to be narrowed down on this theory!

That's true, no doubt, and so matter is not a principle of individuation that works in that way. But there are still genera and species, on this theory, as well as the things that come under genera and species. So if we ask "What is it that allows you to have these other things, and not just genera and species?," the answer is matter on this theory. Again, if you ask "What is it that allows you to make that last step on the Porphyrian tree, from the lowest species to the individuals that come under them?," the answer is matter. So, in that sense, matter is a principle of individuation (in particular, a principle of individuality in the sense distinguished earlier).

We have to watch out for a terminological trap in reading these authors. The term 'individual' isn't always to be taken **(a)** as contrasted with 'universal'; sometimes it should be taken **(b)** as contrasted with 'genus' and 'species'. Even nominalists, even those who hold a variant of the "seal-ring" picture, for which everything is "individual" in the former sense, can nevertheless continue to distinguish individuals from genera and species, so that for them not everything is "individual" in the latter sense. Moral of the story: When you see the term 'individual' used in these authors, you have to be constantly asking yourself, "Individual as opposed to what?"

- (2) A second problem: I just said that matter is a principle of individuation, in the sense that it is what you add at the last step on the Porphyrian tree, to make the transition from the lowest species to the individuals that come under them. It is what provides the ability to have accidents.

But if you go back and look at the Porphyrian tree, and think about how you would build up Socrates, for instance, in the way I did a moment ago, you might say: Wait a minute! Corporeality is the very first difference on the tree. And it is corporeality, isn't it, that distinguishes material substances from immaterial ones? So it looks as if matter is introduced way up at the level of corporeality, not at the last step on the tree.

For that matter, let's push this objection one step further. Substance is a category; it is at the very top of the Porphyrian tree. But we know from what Boethius says about subsisting and substanding, in Text 1 from the *Theological Tractates*, that substances have accidents. And now we've just seen from Text 2 that matter is what makes this possible. So it looks as if matter is introduced at the level of substance, at the very first step of the Porphyrian tree, the very top — not at the very last step. What sense does it make then to talk about matter as a principle of individuation? And for that "matter" (ha ha), what sense does it make to talk about immaterial substances any more?

Well, those are all good questions, but let's not pursue them here. Notice, however, that they in no way indicate that there is anything incoherent or philosophically objectionable about the seal-ring theory we've just seen. At worst, they mean that such a theory will be hard to reconcile with the kind of picture presented by the Porphyrian tree. But perhaps that's not so bad. Perhaps we can abandon that picture. (The Porphyrian tree turns out to have all sorts of awkwardnesses if you think about it carefully.) But let's not prejudge all that. Perhaps everything can be reconciled.

- (3) There is another thing you might say here. You may think it isn't really matter that individuates on this theory — although it certainly has a role to play. Rather it's accidents that individuate.

Matter makes it possible to have accidents, to be sure. (See the *De trinitate*.) But Text 1 from the *Theological Tractates* explicitly says that individuals substand, whereas genera and species subsist (lines 47–52), and that things that substand are said to do so because they underlie and support (“provide a subject for”) accidents (lines 45–47 and 51–52).

So why, you might ask, do I say it's matter that individuates in this doctrine, rather than accidents? (This is what I meant a few moments ago when I said there are different ways one can argue about this.)

Well, good point. What this shows is that both matter and accidents have roles to play in individuating. And that suggests that they might have different roles to play, and be answers to different versions of the “problem of individuation.”

But which is serving which function exactly? Which is individuating in which sense? The texts — and our analysis — are not yet clear on this point.

In any case, the role of accidents provides me with a nice lead-in to another passage I want to focus on in Text 2, from the *De trinitate*.

But before I turn to that, there is one last small terminological point I want you to notice about Text 2. And that is at lines 70–71 (I've flagged it by a note, n. 7.) Boethius is talking about the basis for the unity of the three persons of the Trinity, and he says it is based on a “lack of difference.” The Latin here is ‘*indifferentia*’ = literally, indifference. I just want to call your attention to this now, because the term will come up again explicitly, later in our story. Remember, you saw it here first.

With that, let's turn to the second paragraph of Text 2, still from the *De trinitate* (p. 51, lines 74–88). Basically, this paragraph identifies accidents, not matter, as the principle of individuation. How are we going to fit this together with what we've seen so far? Well, let's look at it.

In this paragraph, Boethius begins by listing three ways in which things may be said to be “diverse from” or “other than” one another: by genus, by species, or by number. Socrates and a line differ in genus. (In fact, they differ in their most general genus; they differ by category. Lines were taken as paradigm examples of continuous quantity, and so fall under the category of quantity, not of substance. There was also discrete quantity, “how many” rather than “how much.”) Again, Socrates and a rose bush differ in genus (although not in the most general genus). Socrates and Fido the dog differ in species. They're both animals, but belong to different species of animals. But Socrates and Plato differ only numerically. That is, there is no essential difference between them at all; they are just two.

This is a standard way of talking, and Boethius is not saying anything new so far. It comes from Aristotle — for instance, *Metaphysics* V.9. (*Metaphysics* V is the so called “Lexicon” book of the *Metaphysics*.)

Explanation. Note that, in general, the term ‘numerical difference’ or ‘numerical diversity’ or ‘numerical distinction’ means merely numerical difference or diversity or distinction. In other words, people don't generally say that Socrates and a line are numerically distinct, even though, if you count them, they are two just as much as Socrates and Plato are. ‘Numerically distinct’, therefore, is usually said only of things in the same most specific species. So too, ‘specifically distinct’ is usually said only of things in the same proximate genus. That convention is perhaps not always observed, but you can pretty much count on it.

The crucial part of this paragraph comes from line 82 to the end:

Now it is the variety of accidents that makes for difference in number. For three men are distinguished not by genus or species [since they are all rational animals], but by their accidents. If by the mind we separate all their accidents from them [UNDERSTAND: all their *other* accidents, we'll see “other than *what*” in a moment — and NOTE: the notion of abstraction or division coming up again here, as it did in the *Commentary on Porphyry*], nevertheless place [there it is] is diverse for each of them, and we can in no way suppose that it is one. For two bodies will not occupy one place, which is an accident [i.e., one of the “accidental” categories]. And therefore they are several in number because they are made several by their accidents.

That's pretty explicit — much more explicit than the theory of matter as the principle of individuation, which we had to extract by juxtaposing passages from the *Contra Eutychen* and the *De trinitate*. In the present passage, unlike what we got out of the earlier discussion, it's pretty clear that accidents individuate in the third sense we distinguished earlier: they are a principle of differentiation; they are what make Socrates and Plato distinct individuals within the same species. Nevertheless, there are some questions to ask here.

First, is it accidents in general or place in particular that's said to be the principle of individuation or differentiation?

Certainly, for physical objects — “bodies” — he explicitly says here that no two bodies can be in the same place. Presumably this means “in the same place at the same time,” so that it's not just place but (as we would put it) spatio-temporal location that's at stake here. Otherwise, once a physical body occupied a certain place, nothing else could ever occupy that same place, which I certainly don't think is what Boethius intends to say at all.

So, a diversity of spatio-temporal coordinates is regarded here as a necessary condition of having two physical objects. And it is also just as plainly regarded as a sufficient condition. The whole point of the end of the passage is that place at least (or place and time) will differentiate the three men.

But it's also fairly clear in the passage that this is a minimal condition. Even if we ignore all their other accidents, he says, we can't disregard the fact they are in different places (at the same time). So presumably those other accidents too, if they are diverse in our three men, would also individuate or differentiate them one from another.

The point then seems to be that it is all the accidents taken together that differentiate one substance from another. If any accident is different, then we have a different individual. In the case of bodies, of course, we know that at least place (or place at a given time) will be different.

This becomes important if we ask: What about things that are not bodies, or that are not in space and time? Boethius doesn't say anything about them here, but presumably they too can be differentiated by their accidents — although place and time will not be involved. In fact, later in the *De trinitate* (Loeb ed., p. 26.40–42 — not translated in the *Notes and Texts*), Boethius explicitly says:

For, absolutely, there is a great truth in the rule that the “distances” [here a metaphor for “distinctions”] among incorporeal things are brought about by differences, not by places.³

In the context, Boethius is talking about God and the Trinity, but presumably the same thing would hold for angels (if Boethius thinks they’re immaterial), or for any other immaterial thing. Place is irrelevant to immaterial things, according to this quotation.

In fact, if you think about the seal-ring theory and the doctrine of individuation by matter (that is, back to the earlier theory, not the one we find in the present paragraph of the text), you can see that there is no way on that picture to talk about the individuation or differentiation of immaterial substances. In fact, on that theory you can’t even have immaterial individual substances as distinct from genera and species. Once you get below the level of genera and species, you get matter; that’s what that theory is all about. (This poses an obvious problem: Does it mean that God is not an individual on the seal-ring picture, but a genus or species? I don’t know that Boethius has any satisfactory answer to this that fits the theory we’ve seen so far.)

In any case the picture we get in the present paragraph is one we’ve not yet seen so far. Here the picture is one of individuation or differentiation by the sum total of all the accidents of a thing.

There’s a problem with this theory, as I see it: It eliminates accidental change. The theory freezes the individual, so that no individual thing can change in any way by acquiring or losing an accident without becoming a different individual than it was beforehand. All change therefore is substantial change. (See the *Warp and Woof* handout.)

When I wiggle my finger, I acquire some new, accidental (and really quite trivial) feature concerning the spatial configuration of my body and its relations to other bodies around me. But, since the accidental features have changed, and since it is just “the variety of accidents that makes for difference in number,” it follows that when I wiggle my finger, I become a new individual, numerically distinct from the one I was before. And that, I suggest, is too high a price to pay. (It also suggests that, on this theory, the variety of accidents is not only the “principle of individuation” in our third sense, a “principle of differentiation,” but also in our

³*Omnino enim magna regulae est veritas in rebus incorporalibus distantias effici differentiis non locis.*

second sense, a principle of individual identification; it is what is responsible for making an individual the individual it is. We'll talk more about that in a moment.)

Note that Leibniz later on (in the 17th century) will have to deal with exactly this same problem. He solves it by adding explicit time-indexing to accidents, so that Caesar, for example, did not have the property of crossing-the-Rubicon, just like that. He had — and always, tenselessly, “has” — the property of crossing-the-Rubicon-on-such-and-such-a-day-at-such-and-such-a-time.

This trick preserves the theory of individuation by “variety of accidents,” as Boethius puts it, but also allows things to undergo what is usually called accidental change. It's just that accidental change is not analyzed now as the gaining or losing of any accident, but simply as the “coming due” of the time-indexes on the various accidents the thing has all along.

This trick is surely reminiscent of a move Boethius himself makes in his *Consolation of Philosophy* when it comes to the problem of reconciling God's omniscience and foreknowledge with human free will. Boethius tries to solve this traditional problem by putting God outside time, and in effect “time-indexing” all God's knowledge. (On this, see “The Course in the Box,” Ver. 2.0, Vol. 1, Ch. 22.) But, for some reason, he doesn't adopt it here in the *De trinitate*, and seems even to be unaware that there is a problem that might warrant adopting it.

A digression. Leibniz's view, I should mention, is already present in St. Augustine (from whom Leibniz more or less consciously took it), in the doctrine of seminal reasons. And for that matter, Augustine took it over from the Stoics. The idea is that the reasons (*rationes*, λόγῳι) or structures of things are already built into creation from the very beginning, and just unfold or develop over time like seeds — or, as Leibniz would say, like clockwork, or as we might put it, like a computer program. Everything that ever happens to the thing is built in in advance.

For Augustine, at any rate, the point of such a theory is in part to accommodate the view that creation was over once and for all at the end of the sixth day of Genesis; any novelties that have emerged since then are really just the unfoldings of “seed reasons” that were there all along. As we might put it, it's all just “pre-programmed.”

Boethius, although he certainly knew his Augustine and had this device available to him, and although he in effect would use it himself in the *Consolation*, for some reason doesn't use it here, and ends up with a theory that rules out any accidental change at all.

Now I should mention at this point that Peter King, who wrote an excellent dissertation on Peter Abelard's theory of universals (on reserve in the Library),

takes me to task for the reasoning I've just gone through, and thinks it fails — or at least he did in his dissertation. Here is what he says (vol. 1, p. 58):

Spade suggests [King here gives a reference to an earlier version of “The Course in the Box” — Ver. 1.0] that this view makes all change into substantial change, for when one gains or loses any accidents one thereby becomes a new individual. [And that is in fact exactly what I have just claimed.] But this is to confuse the question of identity at a time with the question of identity over time; to confuse what makes a thing the very thing it is with what is to count as the same thing (over time). Boethius here could be proposing the former, not the latter, view.

Well, with all due respect to Peter, I'm not sure of this. My first response is to say that I am not confusing those two questions. What I'm doing is observing that Boethius's answer to the first question commits him to an unacceptable answer to the second. And that can surely be said without confusing the two questions.

But maybe there's more to it than this. Consider two metaphysical structures that differ from one another only with respect to a single accident; in all other respects, the two are the same.

Then perhaps what King is saying is this: If we think of those two metaphysical structures as existing at the same time, then clearly Boethius's theory implies that they are two distinct individuals. “It is the variety of accidents that makes for difference in number.” But if we think of them as existing at two different times, then perhaps they are two distinct individual, but perhaps not. That depends not on the question of identity at a time but on the question of identity over time.

But the only way I can think of to make it turn out that these two metaphysical structures are really the same individual at two different times, and still to do justice to Boethius's doctrine in the paragraph we're looking at now, is to go back to the Stoic-Augustinian-Leibnizian theory of seminal reasons and time-indexed accidents — the very theory we just said Boethius does not appeal to here.

In fact, Boethius conspicuously does not appeal to it precisely where one would most expect him to do so, at lines 86–87: “For two bodies will not occupy one place.” The text almost begs out loud to be filled out with the words ‘at the same time’. But Boethius doesn't do it.

In short, I think Boethius really does have a problem here, and that King's objection doesn't disarm it.

Notice, incidentally, that time itself is one of the nine Aristotelian accidental categories, so that if my objection is correct, then not only can't a thing change accidentally over time. It cannot even endure over time. At the later time, it will have a different temporal accident, and so be a distinct individual.

In short, if we push this theory, there is really no such thing as "enduring." What we have instead is a continuous succession of things that exist only for an instant, and then vanish and are succeeded by an entirely distinct but more or less similar thing. There are such theories in the history of philosophy, but Boethius's isn't one of them.

In any case, you can sort all this out for yourselves and make up your own minds.

The theory of individuation or differentiation by accidents can also be found, at least implicitly, in certain other passages from Boethius as well.

For instance, Boethius wrote two commentaries on Aristotle's *De interpretatione*, just as he did on Porphyry's *Isagoge*. Now, *De interpretatione* 7 begins with these words (I've quoted them before):

Among things, some are universal while others are singular. By "universal" I mean that which is apt to be predicated of many, by "singular" that which is not. For example, man is a universal, Callias a singular.

(That's a translation of the Greek. Boethius's own Latin translation substitutes 'Plato' for 'Callias'.)

This passage, of course, provides the commentator with an opportunity to explain the differences between universals and singulars.

I've given you a passage from Boethius's second commentary on this text, in the *Notes and Texts*, right before the passages from the *Theological Tractates*. In that passage (pp. 46–48), beginning in line 31 (p. 46 of the *Notes and Texts*), Boethius talks about "qualities" (as he says) that are unique to a single individual. As I point out in n. 7 of the translation (p. 46), he is using the term 'quality' here very broadly, so that it includes more than things in the Aristotelian category of "quality" in the strict sense, and is as broad as our general term 'feature'. (This is not at all an uncommon usage.) Unlike the "quality" of humanity, he says, which is shared as a whole by several things (lines 34–37 — NOTE: There's no "seal-ring" theory in these lines; he is being pretty explicitly realist here), the "quality"

that's peculiar and unique to Plato, say, is proper and private to him alone; it is not common — not “communicated,” as they say later on.

This peculiar feature of individuals he calls a “characteristic.” The Latin here is ‘*proprietas*’. It's related to, but not the same word as, ‘*proprium*’, which is one of the Porphyrian predicables. A *proprium* or “property” is found only at the level of the species, whereas these “*proprietas*” or “characteristics” Boethius is here talking about are found not only at the level of species, but also at the level of individuals.

In line 43, Boethius even goes so far as to give the characteristic of Plato a name. With some apologies for the neologism, he calls it “Platonity” — that is, the peculiar feature of being Plato.

So “Platonity,” whatever that is, will according to this passage be the answer to the second form of the so called “problem of individuation” we distinguished earlier: the problem of individual identification — what makes an individual the individual it is.

Now, the disappointing thing about this passage is that Boethius doesn't say very much about what this “Platonity” is. He calls it a “quality,” to be sure, but then in the same passage he also calls humanity a quality, so that we don't have any special reason to think Platonity is a kind of accident. In other words, we don't really have enough in this passage to say that we have the theory of individuation by accidents here.

On the other hand, there is yet another passage, this time from Boethius's *Second Commentary on Porphyry's Isagoge* (the same work from which we took our main Boethius text earlier). I've given you this passage also in the *Notes and Texts* (pp. 43–44). It comes from much later in Boethius's commentary than the main passage we looked at earlier. It's part of his commentary on the text where Porphyry is telling us what an individual is (see *Isagoge*, paragraph (36)). Porphyry tells us there that:

Such things are called individuals because each of them consists of characteristics the collection of which can never be the same for anything else.

The word ‘characteristics’ here is ‘*proprietas*’ again (in Boethius's Latin translation), the same word we saw in the commentary on the *De interpretatione* just a moment ago. And there is a corresponding terminological distinction in Porphyry's Greek text between this term and the term for the Porphyrian predicable “property.”

Now the important thing about this is that in Boethius's commentary on this passage, he explicitly says these "characteristics" of individuals "come from accidents," thereby filling in what was missing in the passage from the commentary on the *De interpretatione*. He says it twice, at lines 25–26 ("these characteristics, which came upon him [= Socrates] from accidents") and again at lines 36–37 ("[But] their characteristics, coming from accidents"). He doesn't exactly say they are accidents, mind you; he says only that they "come from accidents." Porphyry, I should add, says nothing like this in his text.

Notice, in Porphyry's own text (the one I quoted a moment ago, para. (36), pp. 6–7), the talk about collections of characteristics. What seems to be going on here, then, is that the characteristics Porphyry is talking about are universal features — like the "characteristic" of man that he mentions later on in the passage (p. 7 (36) line 1). It is only the collection or combination — so to speak, the intersection of a whole bunch of these universal characteristics that is narrowed down to be necessarily unique to a certain individual and to no other.

And this seems to be the idea in Boethius's commentary too. Especially in lines 23–27, we get the picture that the characteristic of Socrates — and here we are talking about an individual characteristic — is a kind of intersection of his being "bald, snubnosed, pot-bellied" and having "other bodily features or well established practices or mannerisms of speech." NOTE: Those are all universal features, each of which applies to lots of people, not just to Socrates.

So, you put these two passages together — the one from the commentary on the *De interpretatione* and this other from the commentary on Porphyry — and you get the picture that Plato's peculiar characteristic, his Platonity, is his unique collection of universal accidents — or at least of universal features that "come from accidents," if that makes a difference.

In short, we get something very much like the doctrine of individuation or differentiation by accidents that we have already seen in the one passage from the *De trinitate*. **BUT THERE IS ONE IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE**::

In the *De trinitate*, the operative statement is that "the variety of accidents makes for difference in number," which would seem to imply a fairly strong version of the Indiscernibility of Identicals, that any accidental difference would result in a distinct individual — which I suggested led to the unacceptable consequence that accidental change is made impossible.

Here, however, in the two commentaries we've just looked at, there is nothing to imply this. Individuation or differentiation appears to be brought about by a combination of accidents — a combination that can only be found in one individual — but there is nothing in these texts to suggest that all the accidents

are included in that combination. In short, if some subset of Plato's accidents is enough to differentiate him from all other real, or perhaps even from all other possible individuals, then there is still room for accidental change with respect to the remaining accidents. Still, how do we tell which ones are the differentiating ones?

Let's now put it all together on individuation. Let's go back and look once again at our three senses of the term 'principle of individuation', and see if we can sort out what plays which role in Boethius — that is, what he really thought — and whether there is any one overall, consistent view here.

Pretty clearly, it is accidents that individuate in sense (3) — that is, they differentiate or distinguish one individual from another in the same species. The second paragraph from Text 2 (from the *De trinitate*) — about “the variety of accidents” — says that explicitly, and it seems to be confirmed in the other passages from the commentaries we've just looked at.

But what about the other two senses? And as far as that goes, what about matter?

Well, the texts are simply not unambiguous here. But I have an interpretation I'm reasonably confident of. It goes like this:

1. Matter is the principle of individuation in sense (1) only — that is, the principle of individuality, what makes something an individual, as opposed to a universal or a genus or species. (See the *Contra Eutychen* and the end of *De trinitate*.)
2. On the other hand, accidents — and in particular, the unique combination of accidents an individual has (either all of them or some of them, depending on which passages you read — the second paragraph of Text 2 [from the *De trinitate*] or the passages from the two commentaries) — individuate in sense (2). They are the “principle of identification.” That is, it is the unique combination of accidents that Socrates has that makes him Socrates — the individual he is. And it is the unique combination of accidents Plato has (his “Platonity,” as Boethius calls it) that makes Plato be Plato.

On this interpretation, then, the unique combination of accidents serves two roles and answers two versions at once of the problem of individuation. It answers both

version (2) and version (3). The unique combination of accidents is what makes an individual the individual it is, and also what differentiates that individual from other individuals in the same species. In the vocabulary of the commentary on the *De interpretatione*, Plato's "Platonity" both is what makes Plato Plato, and also is what distinguishes Plato from Socrates.

I say I am reasonably confident of this interpretation, although it is not forced by the texts. For the fact is, Boethius simply never tells us explicitly that accidents serve function (2) — that Plato's Platonity is an accident or collection of accidents that makes him Plato — although he does say that it distinguishes him from Socrates.

Nevertheless, if you look at what Porphyry says in the passage on which Boethius is commenting (Porphyry, § (36)), he says that each individual consists of characteristics the collection of which will never be the same for anything else.

This certainly looks as if he is saying that accidents not only differentiate one individual from another, but also are what makes an individual the individual it is. That's Porphyry, of course, not Boethius — although since Boethius is commenting on this text, we might suppose that he accepts the doctrine unless he says something to the contrary. On the other hand, perhaps this is to put too much weight on the one word 'consists'.

Now my reason for saying that matter only answers question (1) — that it is what makes something an individual — and not question (2) or (3), is that matter is just matter. (I raised this point briefly a while back.) If we say that matter is what individuates me and matter is what individuates you, then it looks as though it is the same thing that's individuating both of us. This shows that matter cannot "individuate" me in sense (2) — that is, it cannot be such that, when it is present in something, it makes that thing to be me, since then when it is present in you it would make you to be me. So matter cannot serve to answer question (2). And it certainly doesn't answer question (3), since the texts are pretty explicit that the combination of accidents is what answers (3).

On the other hand, we saw some time ago that matter certainly does have some role to play in getting from genera and species to individuals. Thus, there appears to be no other role for it to play than answering question (1). (This of course holds only if our list of three questions for the principles of individuation is an exhaustive list. But I certainly can't think of any other role matter could play.)

Besides, matter fits that role well. The presence of matter is what allows a thing to have accidents, as we saw from the "forms and images" passages in *De trinitate* (lines 123–35), and so what allow it to be an individual. According to these new passages, the particular combination of accidents it turns out actually to have will

determine which individual it turns out to be, and will also distinguish it from other individuals.

Now, if this tentative interpretation is correct — and in particular, if accidents individuate in sense (2), are what makes an individual the individual it is — then we have a serious objection:

It violates what the *Contra Eutychen* said about subsistence vs. substance. According to that text, remember, individual substances are a subclass of the subsistents, and so don't need accidents (see p. 50, lines 48–52 of *Two Texts*):

But individuals not only subsist, they also substand. For neither do they need accidents in order to be. For they are already informed by their properties and specific differences, and provide to accidents the opportunity to be — that is to say, as long as they are subjects.

In other words, according to the *Contra Eutychen*, accidents are derivative from and dependent on substances, which “provide them the opportunity to be.” Not the other way around. But according to the view that accidents make an individual the individual it is, it is the other way around: individual substances do depend on accidents for their very identity. This seems to conflict with the whole notion of an accident — which is, after all, supposed to be — well — merely accidental to a thing.

This rather “unsettled” role for accidents in the theory of individuation is never clarified very satisfactorily in Boethius, and becomes a recurring feature of early medieval thought on this topic — up to the time of Peter Abelard in the twelfth century. He points out the problem explicitly: if accidents give an individual its very identity, they don't seem to be accidental any more. That's not a refutation, of course, but it does mean that if we are going to adhere to a picture like this, we should probably give up the framework of essence and accident altogether, and start using some other vocabulary, some other framework, instead.

Now let's step back, come up for air, take a kind of overview of all this material, and begin to wrap up our discussion of Boethius.

We have:

- (1) The second commentary on Porphyry, where at the beginning (the passage translated in *Five Texts*) Boethius takes a kind of “moderate realist” view. There's nothing

really common out there in reality in the way a universal is supposed to be common. Nevertheless, the mind somehow abstracts a common or universal concept from individuals. Those concepts are therefore grounded in reality, so that the skeptical consequences of nominalism are blocked.

- (2) The passage from the *Contra Eutychen*, and the end of the passage from the *De trinitate* that I've given you. Here we get the distinction between form and image, and the notions of substance and subsistence. These passages are in effect a development of the "seal-ring" metaphor that goes back to Plato. Matter has an important role to play here in individuation, but so do accidents. How exactly those roles are to be sorted out is not made very explicit.
- (3) The second paragraph of the passage from the *De trinitate*, about how "the variety of accidents makes for difference in number." Here the role of accidents in differentiation is emphasized very strongly. This role of accidents is also found in the two short passages I've given you from the commentaries on the *De interpretatione* and on Porphyry, and has roots that go back at least to Porphyry himself.

Given all that, we're now in a position to speculate about what Boethius found objectionable in the theory of universals he set out in the passage from *Five Texts*, and attributes there to Alexander of Aphrodisias and Aristotle, and why he added that odd business at the end about how he has said all he said not because he believes it but because he is dutifully fulfilling his job as a faithful commentator.

If you think about it, the "seal ring" view we've just sketched from the *Theological Tractates* — the *Contra Eutychen* and part of the *De trinitate* — is very much like the theory he attributes to Alexander and Aristotle. The individual humanities of Socrates and Plato, which the commentary on Porphyry appeals to, are just the seal-impressions, the "images" of the *Theological Tractates*. There are no universals; there are only these quite individual "images," and the equally individual "forms" or divine Ideas of which they are the impressions or copies.

The difference between the "seal ring" view Boethius attributes to Alexander and Aristotle, on the one hand, and the "seal ring" view in the *Tractates*, on the other, is that in the former, at least as Boethius tells it, there's no mention of Divine Ideas at all, and no real discussion of matter either.

So, I suggest — and it's not just random speculation, it's informed speculation, although no more than that — Boethius's hesitation about the Alexandrian-

Aristotelian theory centers on the fact that it ignores the role of the Divine Ideas. (As for matter, even though it isn't mentioned in Boethius's discussion, Boethius certainly knew Aristotle well enough to realize that he definitely did not ignore matter.) In short, the problem with that theory is not that it's wrong — as though Boethius accepted a screaming realist view, or as though he were a nominalist but just accepted the skeptical consequences — but rather that it doesn't go far enough. It's incomplete by leaving out the role of the divine Ideas.

The view we've just discussed then — a basically “moderate realist” theory filled out with an account of the role of matter and of the Divine Ideas — is probably Boethius's own theory. Boethius is not 100% consistent about this, of course; there is, after all, the pretty explicitly realist statement in the *Commentary on the De interpretatione* (p. 46, lines 34–35 in the passage in *Notes and Texts*). But by and large, most of what Boethius says seems to converge on this kind of “seal-ring,” “moderate realist” theory.

Nevertheless, if you don't look at the *whole* picture, but concentrate instead on that one passage about how “the variety of accidents makes for difference in number,” and then recall also the passages about “collections of characteristics” in the commentaries on the *De interpretatione* and on Porphyry, you might be led to an altogether different view.

Now, fair warning: What I'm about to give you may strike you at first as pretty far-fetched as an interpretation of Boethius, given all we've looked at so far. But you have to remember that it wasn't true in the Middle Ages any more than it is today that people who interpret their predecessors' philosophical views always take the trouble to look at the whole context; sometimes they focus on tiny little phrases taken out of context, and build whole theories around them.

And in fact that actually happened in the Middle Ages with this passage about how “it is the variety of accidents that makes for difference in number.” As we'll see when we get to the twelfth century and people like William of Champeaux and Clarenbald of Arras, the theory I'm about to give you was actually held, and was attributed to Boethius on the basis of that “slogan” from the *De trinitate*.

So here we go. Look at that passage all by itself — the second paragraph of Text 2 (pp. 51–52). Notice that by itself, there is absolutely no mention of matter in it. On the basis of this text alone, there's no reason to bring in matter at all, and therefore no reason to use the seal-ring metaphor or to distinguish “forms” from “images.”

Of course, there likewise wasn't any talk about forms and images, or even about matter, in the discussion of the Alexandrian-Aristotelian theory earlier in the commentary on Porphyry. But there we did have the nominalist picture of the individualized humanities of Socrates and Plato — with no universal humanity common to them. None of that is explicitly mentioned in this one crucial paragraph of the *De trinitate* about the “variety of accidents.”

Furthermore, as we've seen, the passage from the commentary on the *De interpretatione*, and the passage from the commentary on Porphyry about the “collections of characteristics,” at least strongly suggest that that accidents or characteristics involved here are universal accidents or characteristics, and that it is only their intersection that narrows things down to one individual alone.

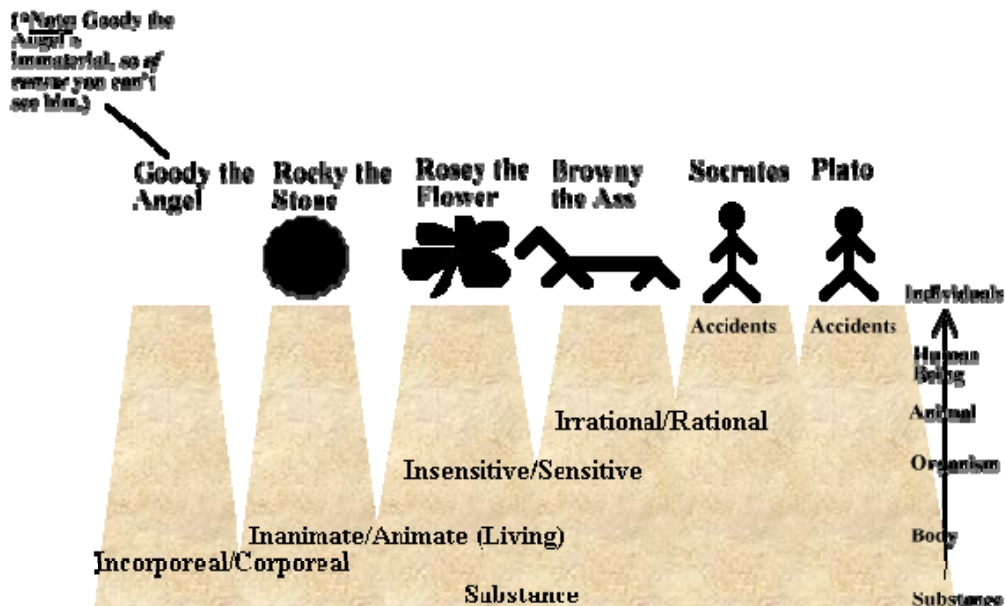
So this isolated paragraph from the *De trinitate*, taken in light of those other passages from the commentaries, is open to a strongly realist development. It doesn't require such reading, but it allows it. On such a realist interpretation, the humanity of Socrates would be the same as — that is, identical with — the humanity of Plato. In Socrates and Plato we have a total of one humanity, not two. To this humanity, you add certain universal accidents that together, by their combination, narrow this universal humanity down to Socrates. And you add other, different accidents that together narrow it down to Plato.

Similarly, Socrates and Brownie the Ass (an example we've met before) really do have a common animality. You add certain other things to that animality to narrow it down to humanity, and then further narrow it down to Socrates. And you add other things to animality to narrow it down to asininity, and then further narrow it down to Brownie.

The individual, then, on this alternative view, is built up like a kind of layer-cake, out of a series of universals. The individual is just the intersection of all these universals.

So the picture looks like this:

Boethius's "Layer Cake" Ontology



Such a highly realist doctrine is allowed by that paragraph from the *De trinitate*, if you take it in isolation, although it is not explicit there. Notice that on this picture, there is no appeal to matter or to the distinction between “forms” and “images.” They simply don’t come up here.

(Note: You wouldn’t expect matter to appear in this context of Boethius’s discussion. He is talking about the inner workings of the Trinity, and there’s no matter in God.)

So, we find in Boethius a kind of “seal-ring,” “moderate realist” theory, and also might think we find in him the basis for a strongly realist theory of universals as well. As I said earlier, I have a thesis I’m sometimes tempted to believe, that all theories of universals ever held in the Middle Ages can be found, at least in germ but in a non-trivial way, in Boethius.

One last thing about Boethius: We’ve already talked about the kind of definition of a universal Boethius gives in his *Commentary on Porphyry* — as something that is common to several things as a whole, simultaneously, and in an appropriate

metaphysically intimate way. For future reference, let us call this the metaphysical definition of a universal.

But if you look back the passage from Boethius's second commentary on the *De interpretatione* in the *Notes and Texts*, and look at the text Boethius is commenting on there, you will see another definition. Aristotle says (p. 45, lines 8–9):

I call “universal” what is apt to be predicated of several [things],
but [I call] “singular” what [is] not.

I mentioned this text in passing earlier, more than once. As it stands, the last part of it is of course ambiguous. The “singular” is not predicated of many, Aristotle says. That could be either because it is predicated of one thing only, or because it's not the kind of thing that can be predicated at all.

Porphyry, however, resolves this ambiguity. For him, the individual is something that is predicated, but predicated of one thing only (*Isagoge*, the end of paragraph 35, p. 6):

But the individual is said of only one of the particulars.

Now predication is often thought of nowadays as exclusively a matter of language. That is, terms are what are predicated. They are predicated of other terms, or perhaps terms are predicated of things, depending on how you want to put it. But, in any case, we don't often say that non-linguistic things are predicated of other things.

Nevertheless, there is a long and quite reputable philosophical tradition according to which “predication” is not exclusively a logico-linguistic relation, but also a relation among things, and according to which, in fact, the predication relations at the level of language (or at least the true ones) are based on and derived from this more basic metaphysical relation of predication. How all this works out is something that takes some work, and we will be discussing it in much more detail later. For the present, however, just observe that Boethius too talks this way a lot. (For passages and references, see Jorge Gracia, *Introduction to the Problem of Individuation in the Early Middle Ages*, Ch. 2. There are lots of such passages.) I talk about all this to some extent in my *Warp and Woof* paper.

Now, it's not at once clear that these two notions of a universal amount to the same thing. That all depends on your theory about these things. Nevertheless, we do have two notions of a universal: the metaphysical notion (what is present “as a whole, simultaneously, and in the right metaphysically intimate way” in several things), and this other one, which I shall call the “logical” or “predicational”

notion, in terms of predication. Both are found in Boethius — as indeed is virtually everything else we have to say about universals in the Middle Ages.

In Boethius himself, the two are not clearly distinguished. And, as far as I can see, all the action in Boethius is with the metaphysical notion of a universal. But keep the other one in mind for future reference.

Historical Overview

The next reading assignment from the *Notes and Texts*:

Fridugisus of Tours, *On the Being of Nothing and Shadows*. (This is the complete work.)

Odo of Tournai, selections from his *On Original Sin*.

We are now done with Boethius.

At this point, let's pause a while and step back for a larger view of things. (I will do this several times throughout the course: After wrangling with the details of a text, we'll pause to catch our breath and look at where we have been and where we are going, both historically and theoretically.)

There are really three main periods in the medieval discussion of universals:

- (1) Boethius, in the late fifth and early sixth centuries. (We've just been through that.)
- (2) The 12th century. Here there are several people to keep in mind, but the main figure is Peter Abelard (1079–1142).
- (3) The period from the middle thirteenth century on. Here there are lots of important names:
 Aquinas, Scotus, Burley, Ockham, Wyclif, and
 many less familiar — but by no means unimportant
 — figures.

The difference between the second and the third period is the presence of the texts of Aristotle.

Recall, I said long ago that, because Greek was largely a forgotten language in the Latin West, the original works of Greek philosophy were for the most part unknown — except for Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Aristotle's *Categories* and *De interpretatione*, and part of Plato's *Timaeus*.

All this changed beginning around the middle of the twelfth century, when a great deal of translating activity took place. On this, see “The Course in the Box,” Ver. 2.0, Vol. 1, Chs. 34 and 44.

Works of many different kinds were translated, including things on mathematics, medicine, etc., as well as philosophy.

In philosophy, the main thing was in effect the rest of the works of Aristotle (almost all of what we have today), along with certain Greek commentaries and the works of certain towering Islamic philosophers like Avicenna and Averroes. (Remember, the bulk of Plato was not translated until the Renaissance.)

By the middle of the thirteenth century, the Latin world had basically all the works of Aristotle — and enough commentary to let them get at least started on assimilating and understanding all this material.

With respect to the problem of universals, of course, the main texts — besides Porphyry and the *Categories* (which the Latins had had ever since Boethius) — were Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*, and a few other texts, but mainly the *Metaphysics*.

It’s the presence of this Aristotelian material that changes the whole flavor of the discussion of universals from the thirteenth century on.

But that’s the thirteenth century. First, we have to go through the twelfth century, with Peter Abelard and his contemporaries.

The interesting thing about these people is that they did not have the metaphysical works of Aristotle. They basically had nothing more than Boethius did — in fact, they had much less than Boethius did, since Boethius knew Greek. They had only what Boethius left. They also drew heavily on mediaeval grammatical theory, in a way I have never really been able to follow completely, although its definitely there.

Nevertheless, the level of sophistication and the fineness of the analysis are very good. These people represent the culmination of early medieval philosophy — before the revolutionary events that came with the rediscovery of Aristotle.

Further Reading Assignment:

For your readings for this part of the course (after Fridugisus and Odo, pp. 55–63, in *Notes and Texts*, who are “transitional” figures), please read:

The passage from Abelard in *Five Texts* and the material from Abelard and from the School of Chartres in the *Notes and Texts*, pp. 65–71. Concentrate on the long passage from Abelard, the one

in *Five Texts*. This is taken from his *Glosses on Porphyry* in a work of his called the *Logica 'ingredientibus'*.

The short passage from John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon* (comment on title) contained in Hyman and Walsh, *Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed., pp. 167–69.

The material on John of Salisbury in Part One of the *Notes and Texts* (this is just a couple of brief notes on the passage I've just mentioned), and the outline of and notes on the long passage from Abelard, also in Part One of the *Notes and Texts* (i.e., *Notes and Texts*, pp. 17–25 [from Part I], and pp. 65–71 [from Part II]). (You are going to need some kind of guide-book to help you through that complicated passage.)

Also (optional):

Peter Abelard, *Story of My Misfortunes*, selection (handout). These pages are public domain, but I have also put on reserve Abelard's *The Story of My Adversities* in the Muckle translation, and I will be quoting from that. (These few pages contain some remarks about Abelard's views on universals. If you have the time, you might like to read the whole of Abelard's *Adversities* (on reserve). It's basically his autobiography, and it's an absolutely amazing document; there's nothing else like it in the Middle Ages. He's brilliant, he's caustic, he's offensive, he's paranoid — and he had an (ahem!) “interesting” life in many respects.)

“The Course in the Box,” Ver. 2.0, Vol. 1, Chap. 42 (on the so called “School of Chartres”).

Note: In “The Course in the Box,” I did not use the translation of Abelard I have included in the *Notes and Texts* (since I had not yet done that translation then), but rather a translation by Richard McKeon, included in many anthologies, among them Hyman and Walsh, *Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. (On reserve.) Everything in this part of “The Course in the Box” is keyed to that translation. The translation is execrable, which is why I did my own. There is also a translation in Peter King's dissertation. But I don't like it either (although it's much better than McKeon's).

Ch. 39 of “The Course in the Box” contains an outline of the main Abelard passage, keyed to the pages in Hyman and Walsh. It is

replaced by the outline in the *Notes and Texts*, which is keyed to my own translation in *Five Texts*.

Also, you should be aware of the following items listed in the handout of “Reserves”:

Peter King’s superb dissertation on Abelard’s theory of universals. (The second volume of this contains translations of lots of texts we will not be discussing much. But they may be of use to you in your papers.)

Jorge Gracia’s book, *Introduction to the Problem of Individuation in the Early Middle Ages*.

Martin Tweedale’s book, *Abailard on Universals*.

But before we get to Abelard and the people around him, I want to look at some other points first. In particular, I want to look at Fridugisus of Tours and Odo of Tournai in the *Notes and Texts*.

(You should regard both of these as more or less “recreational” reading, since neither of them is an especially sophisticated or influential figure. Nevertheless, I will use them to illustrate some general theoretical points. Note that I am paraphrasing “The Course in the Box,” Ver. 2.0, Vol. I, Chap. 37, here, if you want to look at a printed approximation of what I’m about to say.)

Remember our setup: Realists have epistemology on their side, but have difficulties over metaphysical problems. Nominalists have metaphysics on their side, but have difficulties over epistemology.

These are the philosophical pressures of the problem. But the philosophical pressures are not the only ones involved. Some people thought there were, for instance, certain theological considerations that led necessarily to realism. One of these was the doctrine of original sin, the doctrine that the entire human race has somehow inherited the sin committed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and that this “original sin” so wrecked things for human beings that it took a redemptive act by God himself to set things right again.

This is not a peripheral or throw-away doctrine in Christianity. On the contrary, it is one of the two central points of Christianity. (The other one is that things are OK now; we’ve been redeemed. In my more “waggish” moments, I’m tempted to

claim that every other feature of Christian doctrine can be more or less “deduced” from the combination of these two theses.)

In any case, in connection with the doctrine of original sin, look at the passage from Odo of Tournai’s work *On Original Sin* in the *Notes and Texts*.

First, a word about the man. His name was “Odo,” which is a variant of “Otto.” He was born in Orleans, we don’t know when. In 1105, he was elected abbot of the newly restored Benedictine abbey of St. Martin in Tournai, in Belgium, and was indeed the first abbot of that monastery after its restoration. He died in 1113.

Now, an important piece of knowledge about Odo: He is Odo of Tournai, not Odo of Tours. I have checked the biographical information on him, and as far as anyone can tell, he never set foot in Tours. Tours is in France, whereas Tournai is in Belgium.

Nevertheless, there seems to be a plot afoot to move poor old Odo to Tours. The first evidence of this plot comes in Peter King’s dissertation (1982), who in Chap. 5, § 2, discusses “Odo of Tours on Original Sin.” The misnomer then seems to have been picked up by Jorge Gracia in 1984, who devotes Chap. 3, §2, of his book (at least in the first edition) to “Odo of Tours.” In both cases, the man in question is our own Odo of Tournai, who had nothing to do with Tours.

I suspect the error arose over a confusion between Latin ‘Tornacensis’ = Tournai, and ‘Turonensis’ = Tours, together with the fact that the abbey of St. Martin in Tournai is a relatively obscure little abbey, whereas the abbey of St. Martin of Tours is a famous and important one.

In any case, I am happy to report that I gleefully called King’s and Gracia’s attention to this, and that in the second edition of Gracia’s book, and in the long promised but probably no longer forthcoming publication of King’s dissertation, poor old Odo has been returned to his rightful place.

Odo is supposed to have written a number of works on dialectic and logic, some of which have interesting titles, but none of which has come down to us today. The work we are concerned with is instead a theological work, his *On Original Sin*.

The problem that concerns Odo is this: According to the standard Biblical account of the origin of species, we are all descended from Adam. That is, we get our bodies from Adam through the normal reproductive and genetic processes. It is purely a matter of biology. So there is a physical continuity between Adam and us — a genetic continuity, if you will, although of course Odo himself wasn’t thinking in terms of chromosomes.

But — and here is the crucial point — our souls do not come from Adam. That is, we do not inherit the soul. It is not transmitted in the way the body is. On the contrary, by this time, the generally accepted doctrine was that the individual soul is the product of a kind of special on-the-spot creation by God at some point in the development of the fetus (not necessarily at conception).

The production of our bodies, then, is a matter of rearranging and restructuring matter that has presumably existed in some form or other all the way back to the original six days of creation. It is a case of getting the right carbon atoms, proteins, nutrients, etc., all put together in the right way (although medieval authors wouldn't have put it in those terms).

But our souls are not like this. They are not manufactured by a kind of development or restructuring of pre-existing soul-stuff. They are made up ex nihilo on a case by case basis.

Fine, but now what about the doctrine of original sin? Well, Odo points out, sin is something that inheres in the soul, not in the body. (The consequences of sin, such as our being susceptible to diseases and to death, may be said to inhere in the body, but that's a different story.)

So, if sin infects the soul and not the body, and if only our bodies and not our souls come from Adam, then how can we in any sense be said to have inherited original sin from Adam? How is it that we share in Adam's sin?

Note, incidentally, that this is a very good theological question. If you are going to interpret the doctrine of original sin as anything more than a kind of pious, edifying, but basically symbolic story, it is not at all clear how you are going to answer this question. As a result of this kind of problem, some people have toyed with the idea that we do inherit the soul from Adam, just as we do the body.

Now, what does Odo do in this situation? Well, he starts like this:

He points out, first of all (lines 30–31), that it's perfectly possible to have a species that as a matter of fact turns out to have only one individual in it. There might have been, for instance, only one man — say, a certain Peter. Or, he goes on (lines 35–36), consider the species phoenix.

The phoenix, you will recall from your study of Egyptian mythology, is a beautiful, unique bird that lives in the Arabian desert for 500 or 600 years (accounts vary), and then consumes itself in a fire, only to rise again from its own ashes to begin another long life, over and over again. It is used as a symbol of immortality and bodily resurrection.

Well, you can think what you like about the phoenix. It's not clear it is really a very good illustration of Odo's point anyway. Perhaps an easier example is the

sun. (Many people used this example later on.) In order to make the example work, you have to regard the term ‘sun’ not as a proper name of the particular fireball we all know in our sky, but rather as a kind of job-description.

Now, we have only one sun in our sky, although it is perfectly possible (and indeed true in various science-fiction stories) that there would be two or more. In other words, sun is a species; this sun — the one we’ve got — is an individual in that species, and as it happens, the only individual within that species. There might have been several suns, and if there were, they would all have the same substance or species, and would differ only by their accidents (lines 29–30).

Now where do you suppose Odo got that last bit? Recall the doctrine of individuation by accidents we saw earlier in Boethius’s *De trinitate*. Here it is coming up again. And in fact Odo goes on in line 31 to say that a man, for example a certain Peter, “is an individual because of the collection of his accidents.” Recall the talk about “collections of characteristics” in Porphyry and in Boethius’s commentary on Porphyry (the shorter text, the one I gave you in the *Notes and Text*) linking those “characteristics” with accidents.

Now, a short digression. Odo claims in lines 31–32 that you cannot in the same way have a genus with only one species in it. The whole point of a species is that it is supposed to subdivide a genus into a subsection, so that there must be a remainder: another species. A genus must have at least two species (And, I might add, depending on how you work out the Porphyrian tree, perhaps a genus must have exactly two species in it.)

Well, that’s Odo’s view, at any rate: a genus must have at least two species. But it’s not at all clear to me that he’s made his case.

It’s true that, conceptually speaking, if you add “rational” to “animal” to get “man,” then you are implicitly allowing that there is a species of irrational animals too. Otherwise, the addition is not really an addition. (Go back and look at the reasoning in the handout “Why Being Is Not A Genus.”) But that’s all a matter of conceptual division. It still seems perfectly possible to have it be the case in fact that the only animals that exist are human beings (say) — just as Odo himself admits that it was once the case (in the Garden of Eden) that the only human being who existed was Adam.

In short, genera and species appear to be quite alike in this respect. If we are talking conceptually, then just as you cannot have a genus that is not divisible into several species, so too you cannot have a species that is not divisible into — that is, potentially common — to several individuals. On the other hand, just as you

can have in fact a species with only a single individual in it (so that the species is not actually common to several things — like the sun or the phoenix, or the species man), so too it seems you could have a genus with only a single species in it, even though it could have had more.

So, it seems to me that Odo has not made his point. But, the point doesn't really matter for us. So let us end our digression.

Odo goes on (lines 46–49) to say:

And when the species is said of a solitary individual [i.e., when we do have a case of a species with only one individual in it], only then is it valid to attribute an accident both to the individual and to the species, although principally and in the first place accidents are in individuals.

There are several things implicit in this passage: First of all, accidents, he says, do not strictly speaking (“principally and in the first place”) inhere in species. And where do you suppose Odo got that? Recall Boethius’s *De trinitate* again (near the end of Text 2 I gave you, lines 125–28), or his *Contra Eutychen*. To be sure, Boethius there goes on to say accidents inhere in matter, whereas Odo says they inhere principally in individuals. But that’s not the important point. The important point is that they both say accidents do not inhere in species.

Nevertheless, Odo goes on in the passage just quoted, even though strictly speaking accidents do not inhere in species but only in individuals, still if, as it happens, there is only one individual in the species, and if it has an accident A, then we can in a sense (but not “strictly”) say that the species itself has accident A.

Now, although that’s what he says, Odo in fact means something a little stronger. He means that, whether there is one member of a species or several, as long as every member of the species has the accident A, then we can in a sense say the species itself has A. We’ll see in a moment why he need the more general formulation.

In short, if Adam had blue eyes, then as long as he was alone in the Garden of Eden (that is, until Eve came along — and if she had blue eyes too, then the point would still continue to hold), it was in a sense true to say that humanity itself had blue eyes — since every human being (namely, the only one) did.

Now here is how all this gets applied to the case at hand. (See the paragraph beginning at line 50.)

While Adam and Eve were still the only people in the Garden, they both sinned. That is, every human sinned, and therefore, humanity itself in a sense sinned. (This is why I said that Odo wanted to generalize his claim: not just if there is only one member of a species, but as long as every member of a species had accident A, the species as a whole can be said to have A. After all, when the sin occurred in the Garden, there was more than one human being.)

Since every human being then in existence in the Garden of Eden then sinned, so that humanity itself in a sense sinned, the sin of Adam therefore somehow infects the whole species. Hence we, who are of the same species as Adam and get souls of the same nature as his (although of course we do not get them biologically from him), end up with souls infected with sin too. By the time a third human being came on the scene, it was too late. The entire nature had been corrupted.

It is important of course that both Adam and Eve sinned. If Eve had eaten the apple and then given it to Adam who threw it away in pious indignation, then there would have been no original sin in the whole species. Presumably, Eve would have been in big trouble, but she alone would have been guilty. In order to affect the entire human species, Adam's contribution was crucial too.

There is some traditional basis for this device of applying the accidents of individuals to the species. In *Categories* 5 3^a4–6, for example, Aristotle says:

If we call an individual man “skilled in grammar,” the predicate is applicable also to the species and to the genus to which he belongs. This law holds good in all cases.

Note that Aristotle does not say that every member of the species or genus has to be “skilled in grammar.” In fact, he seems to suggest that even a single case suffices, no matter how many individuals the species or genus has.

Later on, in the late fourteenth century, this kind of thing will become an important worry to people like John Wyclif. If a single man runs, then in what sense can we say that man runs? The text I just quoted from Aristotle would seem to allow at least some sense in which this is legitimate. How do we sort all this out? (The question is a rather more natural one in Latin than in English, because Latin has no indefinite articles.)

Well, however it all works out, it ought to be clear that as an account of original sin, Odo's theory is a crazy doctrine. If you poke at it even a little bit, it falls apart. If Adam and Eve were both right-handed, then so is the entire human

species. If Adam and Eve both danced a jig in the Garden of Eden, then so do I, since what they did affects the whole human species, in which I partake.

But my reason for discussing Odo's theory here is not that it is a good theory, but rather that it is a strongly realist theory. And notice why Odo thinks he has to be a realist here. It is to accommodate a theological doctrine, not a philosophical one: the doctrine of original sin.

There is another traditional theological reason too why some people have felt they had to be realists. And that is the doctrine of the Trinity.

I must confess, I have never understood the pressure here. But if you look at "The Course in the Box," Ver. 3.0, Vol. II, Text 12 (handout "Selections from Anselm's Correspondence concerning Roscelin"), you will find there several passages from St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), who was arguing against a certain Roscelin. (We don't know much about Roscelin's life or his philosophy, although you might want to look at the papers by Eike-Henneer W. Kluge and Constant J. Mews on Anselm, in the "Articles (Bibliography)" subfolder of our "Resources" page on Oncourse. We will have more to say about Roscelin later on, in connection with Abelard.)

In any case, Anselm suggests that Roscelin was an extreme nominalist, a nominalist of the strict observance. He held a strong form of the view that there is nothing really shared by or common to many things in reality — not even in God. As a result, Anselm seems to argue, if there are three divine persons in the Trinity, then on Roscelin's theory there must be three gods, since there is nothing at all that unites them metaphysically into a unity.

Roscelin is the only medieval figure I know of who was ever accused of out and out tritheism (by Anselm) as a result of his nominalism. It is unclear whether Roscelin himself ever went so far as that. And in fact, it is unclear to me whether such a doctrine has anything to do with nominalism. On the contrary, it seems to me that realism would be the doctrine that leads more directly to tritheism here.

That is, if you think you need to be a realist because of the doctrine of the Trinity (as Anselm apparently did), then this is presumably because you think that the divine nature is a universal common to the three divine persons. Otherwise, it seems to me, realism and nominalism are simply irrelevant to Trinitarian doctrine.

But in fact, if you do think the divine nature is a universal common to the three persons of the Trinity, then it is you who are committed to tritheism, not the nominalist. For consider: If you have a universal human nature common to three individuals, what do you say about the three individuals? You say they are three men. So too — and I see no relevant difference here — if the divine nature is a universal common to the three divine persons, then you have three gods. In short,

you had better not interpret Trinitarian doctrine in terms of the theory of universals.

In the late fourteenth century, this was explicitly recognized by John Wyclif, who says in his *On Universals* (Chap. 8, lines 621–23 of Anthony Kenny’s translation):

But there is a great dissimilarity between the relation between the common divine nature and its persons, and the relation between specific nature and its persons.

Nevertheless, Wyclif goes on to say (lines 625–27), even though the divine nature is not a universal, the theory of universals is very instructive in interpreting the doctrine of the Trinity. He says:

And this, I believe, is the reason why God has not permitted the doctrine of universals to die out altogether.

In short, realists enjoy a kind of special divine protection!

Well, you can believe that or not, as you wish. For my own part, although I am willing to grant with Wyclif that the notion of a universal is a useful thing to keep in mind when thinking about the theology of the Trinity, I simply see no necessary connection at all between nominalism and tritheism, no matter what Anselm said.

But, however that works out, many people apparently thought — and still think today — that there is some connection here, so that orthodoxy requires some version of realism.

We have then at least two kinds of theological pressures that people have sometimes felt compelled them to a version of realism: the doctrine of original sin, and the doctrine of the Trinity.

In addition to these theological reasons, of course, there were also purely philosophical ones. We have already talked several times about the epistemological reasons for realism.

I want to say some more about those now.

Recall: reasons for realism are reasons against nominalism, and the main traditional reason against nominalism is that it seems to make any knowledge of the world impossible.

First: Think back to the beginning of this course, when I was first setting up the arguments on both sides. At that time, I said that one way in which nominalism seemed to compromise the possibility of knowledge of the world is that it made our knowledge claims arbitrary. That is, if there are no real universal entities out there to correspond to our general concepts and terms, then the fact that we automatically and spontaneously tend to group things together and think of them as under a common concept, and refer to them with a common term — that fact would be without any objective justification. Our classifications of things would not, then, “cleave nature at the joints” — to use Plato’s phrase. They would reflect perhaps our conceptual framework, our beliefs, our cultural conditioning, our pragmatic and perhaps scientific purposes — but they would not reliably reflect the way things really “are” in any objective sense.

In short, if nominalism is correct, then our so called “knowledge” cannot be a matter of our discovering the way things are, but must be instead a matter of how we interpret the way things are. Knowledge, then, would not be a discovery but a constructing.

This then is the first strand I want to separate out of the cluster of epistemological arguments against nominalism. To put it in a kind of slogan, it is the strand that would push nominalism toward a kind of pragmatic theory of knowledge — and in fact has pushed some modern nominalists in that direction. (Note that this is not exactly “skepticism,” but a much more sweeping claim.)

Now if you think about this line of reasoning carefully, I think you will see that there is an implicit but important assumption behind it. The assumption is that if our groupings and classifications of things are to have any objective justification, we must somehow derive those groupings and classifications from observing the things so grouped and classified.

In other words, the argument seems to run implicitly like this:

- (1) On a nominalist theory, if we observe the objects of knowledge, we will not find there any objective basis for grouping them together in this way rather than that. For example, grouping Socrates and Plato together and calling them both “men.” In short:

Nominalism → No objective basis
for our general groupings of things
can be found in the objects
themselves.

- (2) But — an ASSUMPTION — since, if we are going to have any objective basis for such groupings, we could only get it by looking at the objects themselves, it appears that nominalism leaves us with no objective basis at all.

Now, that second step incorporates a kind of empiricist premise. By ‘empiricism’ here I do not necessarily mean the doctrine that all our knowledge comes from sensation, but rather the doctrine that all our knowledge (or at least all our knowledge that proceeds in general terms) comes from experience of the objects known, whether that experience comes from the senses or however. That is, step (2) amounts to saying:

If there is any objective basis at all
for our general groupings of things,
that basis must be found in the
objects so grouped:

Basis → in objects.

What would happen if we rejected that assumption? Let me sharpen the point by asking: What happens to the argument I’ve just given you (the “first strand” of the epistemological case against nominalism) if we apply it not to our knowledge (that is, to human knowledge) but to God’s knowledge?

Well, of course, God is supposed to have “universal” or general concepts just as much as we do. They are called divine Ideas (according to a medieval doctrine we’ve met before, that goes back through Augustine to Philo of Alexandria, and became pretty much the standard view).

But God’s knowledge — and so God’s universal concepts — are not derived by observing the objects known. (At least this is so for God’s knowledge of creatures.) God’s knowledge does not depend on creatures; indeed, nothing about God depends on creatures. It is the other way around. Creatures depend on God — he created them, after all. And he created them knowing what he was doing. (That is called divine “providence.”) In other words, he created them in accordance with the divine Ideas.

The point is: God’s knowledge is not the knowledge of an investigator; it is the knowledge of an artisan who has a picture in his mind in advance that serves as a kind of model or pattern for what he then produces. God’s knowledge, therefore, is not a discovering but a constructing.

Now, of course, there are problems with this traditional view. One main problem is how to reconcile it with the doctrine of human free will. If God knows my

future actions in the same way he knows the laws of the solar system — namely, because he determined them to turn out that way — then it appears that there is no truly free will for us humans.

This is a real problem, but I want to set it aside because it seems to me to be equally a problem whether you are a nominalist or a realist about universals. So too, if the problem can be solved, its solution (as far as I can see) will have nothing to do with the problem of universals. In short, the problem of reconciling divine omniscience with human free will seems to be an entirely separate issue. So let's focus instead on other cases of divine knowledge of the world: other things he knows because he set them up that way in accordance with his own divine Ideas.

What does all this have to do with the argument against nominalism we were considering a moment ago? Well, I think you can see that it undercuts that argument completely. The argument got its plausibility from the assumption that our universal concepts must somehow be derived from their objects. But that is simply not so for God's concepts.

So — as far as this argument at least is concerned — the nominalist may have a hard time accounting for human knowledge, but he will not have any special difficulty with God's knowledge.

How then does God's knowledge work? Well, one theory goes like this: God knows the way things are out here in the created world because he knows his own acts of will, his own decisions to create this and to create that. (Aquinas maintains a doctrine like this.)

For our purposes, the point is: Each of these acts of will, and each of the resulting creative productions, is quite consistent with a nominalist metaphysics. That is, there doesn't have to be any kind of metaphysical universal here — or at least not for any epistemological reasons.

There are universal or general concepts involved in God's creative activity, the divine Ideas — just as we have universal or general concepts too. But the universal or general divine concepts are not metaphysical universals any more than Platonic Forms are. They are "universal" merely in the sense of having many effects at once. Recall the "seal ring" theory.

God, then, can say: "I'm going to create Socrates, in accordance with my Idea that I call the Idea of man," and then again he can say "I'm going to create Plato, in accordance with that same Idea that I call the Idea of man." And so on. There's nothing metaphysically universal here; each act is entirely a singular affair. Although it may appeal to a universal concept, and to the same universal concept each time, metaphysically there is nothing but individuals on this account.

Objection: Now you might say that this just isn't so. Creation itself will turn out to be a universal relation on this theory. All creatures will be related to God's will through this one universal relation: creation. So the theory hasn't really made its case. We don't have a nominalism that does away with universals altogether; we have only reduced their number.

Reply: Well, you can say that if you want. But the point is: You don't have to say it if you don't want.

In other words, this objection shows a preference toward realism more than it shows us any real argument against nominalism.

What we have here is a situation very much like a situation we've already seen — back when we were talking about the seal-ring metaphor in Boethius. Then I said that a realist might claim that the relation of the seal-ring to each of its impressions in the wax — the relation of causing or impressing — is a universal relation. I also said that the nominalist could quite rightly reply: No. If you are nominalist enough to use the seal-ring metaphor to begin with, then you ought to be nominalist enough to use it again to account for the relations of impressing.

(Remember, the seal-ring metaphor is a metaphor; it is a model for a theory. It is not by itself an argument for that theory. The theory captured in that model would have to be argued for on some other grounds.)

The realist might very well feel uneasy about the claim that God's knowledge, interpreted as I have just done, does not require any universals. But uneasiness does not count as an argument where I come from. And, as far as I can see, the realist has no argument here — or at least no epistemological argument along the lines we have just been considering. The nominalist can maintain his case.

Another objection: Now, the realist might still have an answer. He might say: It's all very good to save God's knowledge in this way. But a nominalist should derive little comfort from this achievement, since whatever is the case for God's knowledge, it appears that humans still don't have any knowledge. We don't establish the metaphysical structures of the world by our concepts. Hence the argument we have been considering may not work for God, but it still appears to work for humans, so that the nominalist is in almost as bad a situation as before.

Reply: But not so. It would only be so if the only way we could get our universal concepts, and justify them, were by observing the objects. That is, only if we accepted the hidden "empiricist" assumption behind the second step of the argument I sketched just above.

But, historically, there have been lots of theories according to which that assumption is just not so.

Consider Descartes' theory of innate ideas, for instance. (Not that Descartes himself was a nominalist. My point is only that he doesn't think he has to ground general human concepts in metaphysical universals.) Those innate ideas were implanted in us at birth. Unlike the Platonic theory of Recollection, which holds that pretty much the same ideas Descartes wanted to call "innate" were in fact acquired by a direct experience with the corresponding objects in a prior state, Descartes' theory of innate ideas holds that these ideas are not derived from any experience with external objects. And yet, according to Descartes, they give us real knowledge of the physical world. In fact, for Descartes, they give us the only real knowledge of the physical world we can possibly have. What we have here is in effect another version of the familiar "seal ring" theory.

So too, there was a theory of human knowledge that was very common in the early Middle Ages — indeed, it was pretty much the standard theory. It is called the "Theory of Illumination," and it goes back to Augustine. And, although later on some people (like Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus) rejected the theory, it remained a live, viable epistemological option right up to the end of the Middle Ages and beyond. (For that matter, Descartes's doctrine of innate ideas is a kind of "degenerate" form — degenerate, that is, in my opinion — of Augustine's Theory of Illumination.)

According to the Theory of Illumination, knowledge is not something that is derived from the objects known; it is something that is put into our minds by God.

Of course there are lots of qualification, limitations and adjustments that have to be made both to make this theory a plausible one and also to make it historically accurate to the Augustinian texts. But I don't want to go into all that now. (The theory of illumination is discussed at some length in several chapters of "The Course in the Box," Ver. 2.0.) My point is that you are now in a position to discern a way out of our problem — that is, a way to avoid at least this strand of the epistemological argument against nominalism.

If our universal concepts are not somehow derived from the objects known, but are put into our minds directly by God, then just as God's knowledge does not require the existence of metaphysically real universals, so too neither does our human knowledge. Just as God's knowledge can proceed in terms of the general ideas in the divine mind (which are not copied from reality, but the other way around: reality is copied from them), so too our human knowledge can proceed in terms of our own general concepts — and with just as much authority — because those concepts are implanted in us by God, not derived from the objects.

Let me summarize this: It seems to me that the strand of epistemological argument that would tend to push nominalism toward a pragmatic theory of knowledge as the only alternative to out and out skepticism can be countered by

adopting something like a theory of illumination, or some other theory that severs the empiricist connection in step (2) of the argument I sketched above.

You may not be comfortable with the theological assumptions of a theory of illumination, but that is not the point. If you don't want to believe in God, for instance, then perhaps you can find something else to play the same role for you (the Platonic Theory of Recollection, for example). The point is just that there may very well be an alternative to accounting for our universal concepts in terms of our deriving them from the objects known by them. And if there is, then one kind of epistemological argument against nominalism will fail.

So, we've learned something. And in fact we've learned something pretty important. We've learned that nominalism does not run into problems with epistemology in general, but only with a kind of empiricist epistemology. At least this is so with respect to this first line of reasoning I've just been considering, the question about the objective basis for our general groupings of things.

Note, incidentally, that if these considerations carry any weight at all, then Boethius was quite right to express hesitations over the "moderate realist" theory he had presented in his *Second Commentary on Porphyry*, with its theory of "abstraction" or "division," regarded as a process of filtering out or subtracting. Earlier, I speculated that perhaps the main reason for Boethius's hesitations about this theory is that it left out any role for the Divine Ideas. If that's right, then it was a very good reason indeed.

But there is also a second strand of argumentation I want to separate out of the cluster of epistemological reasons against nominalism. If the first strand focused on the notion of knowledge, this second one focuses on the notion of truth. As a result, you may not want to regard it as properly an epistemological argument at all — although, since knowledge implies truth, it will certainly have epistemological consequences.

This second strand of argumentation can perhaps best be approached by stating it in its most extreme form first. Not that the most extreme form is very plausible, but the most extreme form is the one in which it's easiest to see the point. This new line of argument is based on what might be called a picture theory of truth, somewhat in the sense in which the early Wittgenstein was said to have maintained a "picture theory of truth."

The reasoning here goes like this — and once again I'm putting it in its most extreme (and therefore probably least plausible) form in order to make it as clear as possible:

If our knowledge is to be knowledge, it must first of all be true. (That's fair enough.) But, in order for our judgments to be true (the theory goes), they must somehow capture the way the world really is. In short, there must be a kind of correspondence between the elements of our true judgments and the things in the world. What grounds the truth of our judgments in the world must have the same structure as the judgments themselves have. (One form of this is what I called the "Platonic"-style approach to metaphysics in the *Warp and Woof* paper. I'm not now thinking of the "seal ring" picture, but rather the discussion of predication in that paper.)

Let me illustrate the theory. If I say "The cat is on the mat" — and if that's true — then there must be something out there corresponding to the term 'cat', and something out there corresponding to the term 'mat', and something out there corresponding to the relation expressed by 'is on', and so on.

People who don't like theories like this make fun of them by saying that, on such a theory, the world turns out to look very much like an English sentence. And in a sense this summation is not too far off the mark — although it doesn't look quite so immediately ridiculous once you realize that it is not so much the structure of spoken languages that is at stake, but rather the structure of judgments, which you may very well want to interpret in terms of thoughts that are expressed by spoken sentences.

The basic idea then is that the form of our true judgments is the logical form of the world.

Now what does this have to do with realism, you might well ask. The connection is this: If you do not hold some form of the picture-theory of truth, if you grant that the relation between our true judgments and the world does not have to proceed in this fashion, then why on earth would anyone think we need to have a universal or common *entity* to correspond to our universal or general concepts?

In other words, the "picture theory" appears to provide one of the most basic motivations behind the argument that we need to have universal entities in the world to correspond to our general concepts — and therefore in order for our judgments in terms of general concepts to have any chance at all of being true.

So, even if you grant that the first strand of argument I gave you a while ago can be met by some version of a theory of illumination (say), there is still this second strand that appears to lead just as inevitably to realism — at least if we're going to preserve the truth of any of our general judgments.

Of course, it's certainly true that a subtle theoretician might very well reject the extreme form of this "picture" theory I've just given you, and yet still find philosophical reasons for thinking he has to be a realist. Nevertheless, the picture

theory as I have stated it does encapsulate a prominent underlying historical tendency in its most extreme — and therefore its clearest — form.

The extreme form of this theory is not just a historical abstraction; I am not just setting up a straw man here.

Some people in the Middle Ages did in fact explicitly hold a relatively extreme form of the view that our true thoughts map part by part onto reality (although they did not, as far as I know, explicitly apply this view to the problem of universals).

For example, a certain Fridugisus, in his very odd *Letter on Nothing and Shadows*, contained in the *Notes and Texts*.

Fridugisus (there are lots of different spellings of his name, at least seventeen of which have some manuscript authority) was associated with the court of Charlemagne in the ninth century. Note that this puts him before Odo of Tournai. I'm treating him out of sequence here, because I wanted to discuss the issues raised by Odo before I got to this new point. I should hasten to warn you that Fridugisus was not an especially good or especially important philosopher, and in fact might be called a "hack." But he does illustrate the point I want to make.

Fridugisus' *Letter on Nothing and Shadows* was a letter written to Charlemagne, who must have been very surprised to get it.

Look at line 38 of the translation: "Let us proceed by reason," he says. "Every finite name signifies something."

Now first, some points of terminology. The word 'name' here is '*nomen*' in Latin, and it's a medieval grammatical term that means both nouns and pronouns and also adjectives. A "finite" name is to be contrasted with an "infinite" name, which is what they called expressions like 'non-man' or 'non-tree'. (This terminology comes from Aristotle, *De interpretatione* 2 16^a30–32.) Fridugisus doesn't say anything about whether infinite names signify anything or not; his claim is confined to the finite ones.

Now (he goes in lines 42–43) the word 'nothing' is a finite name, as the grammarians tell us. It is not an infinite name, since it does not have the prefix 'non-' or an equivalent.

(In Latin, 'nihil' = 'nothing' is not obviously made up of 'no' + 'thing', as in English. Etymologically, to be sure, the word comes from 'ne' + 'hilum' = 'not in the least', so there is a kind of negative built into it, but let's just pretend we don't know that. Fridugisus certainly didn't know it.)

So, ‘nothing’ is not an infinite name. And yet it certainly is a name. After all, it functions grammatically like a name — like a noun, in fact. It can serve in subject position in a sentence, for example. So, by a process of elimination, it’s a finite name. (Here, incidentally, is an instance of the role of medieval grammatical theory that I said runs all through the medieval problem of universals.)

Therefore, since “every finite name signifies something,” as Fridugisus has said, it follows that ‘nothing’ signifies something.

But now that’s a peculiar thing to say. For consider:

Just as to say that the term ‘tree’ (quotation marks) signifies a certain kind of plant amounts to saying that a tree (no quotation marks) is a certain kind of plant, and to say that the term ‘dog’ (quotation marks) signifies a certain kind of animal amounts to saying that a dog (no quotation marks) is a certain kind of animal — so too, it would seem, to say the term ‘nothing’ (quotation marks) signifies something amounts to saying that nothing (no quotation marks) is something. And that certainly seems odd.

But Fridugisus just accepts the consequence, peculiar or not, on the basis of his principle about finite names. In fact, he goes on to say that this nothing is not only something, it’s a very important something, since it is that out of which God created everything. God created ex nihilo (= out of nothing), recall.

Fridugisus then goes on to suggest that this very special nothing is pretty spooky stuff, a little like “shadows.” But, fortunately, we don’t have to follow his argument any further.

You can see what is happening here. The naive and extreme application of the “picture theory” I set out earlier gets you involved in hopeless confusions and paradox. After all, if we are going to treat ‘nothing’ just like any other noun, then we might as well argue:

Nothing is better than eternal happiness.
 But a Big Mac is better than nothing.
 ∴ Therefore, a Big Mac is better than eternal happiness,

by the transitivity of ‘better than’.

Of course, you might well say: Look, we sophisticates in the twentieth century, who are blessed with all knowledge and most wisdom, surely know that ‘nothing’ may look like a noun, and grammatically is one (actually, it’s a pronoun, but the point is the same: it’s still a “name” in Fridugisus’s sense) — it can be the subject of a sentence, for instance. But of course really it can be paraphrased away. To

say that God created ex nihilo is only to say that he created and did not create from something.

That's true, of course. But now you're tampering with the "picture theory." You're saying there need not be a one-for-one correspondence between true thoughts and the world — or rather between the parts of true thoughts and the parts of the world. The correspondence can be more indirect. It can be got at by "paraphrase," for instance. But by weakening the "picture theory" in this way, you have to ask yourself whether you aren't weakening your case for realism too.

As it turns out, there are theological reasons too for not accepting the "picture theory" in the naive and extreme form in which I presented it earlier, and in which we find it in Fridugisus. I don't want to go into these now, but I discuss them in "The Course in the Box," Ver. 2.0, Vol. 1, Ch. 37 (from which I am taking a lot of what I am saying now). They involve the problem of evil.

Let's make a second pass over this second strand of argumentation, the "picture theory" argument. It turns out it's actually a more serious argument than it might at first appear.

Let's push the argument further. You might say: Let's not bother with the naive and extreme form of the picture theory. Let's be a little more sophisticated about it. Let's say that the surface-structure of our judgments masks a deeper and more fundamental structure, so that words like 'nothing' can be paraphrased away and can be strictly done without in a suitably pure language. (Recall the "ideal"-language theories of some early-twentieth century philosophers, or for that matter Chomsky's talk about "surface structure" and "deep structure.") Then let's say that the correspondence between thought and reality doesn't occur at the level of the surface structure, but at the level of deep structure. Then you might go on to say that, while at that deeper level of fully expanded paraphrase, you may not need words like 'nothing' — and so we will not need to postulate nothings in reality to correspond to that word — nevertheless, we certainly will need some general terms at least, and so at least some universals in the world. In short, funny terms like 'nothing' can be paraphrased away. But we can't do without any general terms whatever!

Now that's a fairly sophisticated line to take, but it is fancier than things got in the early Middle Ages. This kind of argument would be more at home in the fourteenth century.

William of Ockham, for instance (early fourteenth century), will argue by means of such considerations of "deep structure" or paraphrase (these come out in his so called "connotation theory"), that you don't need an entity corresponding to the word 'nothing'. He went even further and said that you don't really need to

postulate entities to correspond to terms in all the Aristotelian categories. You can say everything you want to say — although not so briefly — by using only substance terms and quality terms (and connecting words, of course). You don't need real places, for instance, to answer to terms in the Aristotelian category of place. And so on. Motion for Ockham is not something over and above substances and their qualities. You don't need motion terms in a suitably periphrastic language, and so you don't need such entities in your ontology.

Ockham uses the paraphrase argument in this way to cut down the list of categories in the world. Or at least that seems to be what he's doing with such paraphrases. There is some doubt about exactly what his intentions were. But, whatever he was doing, when he comes to argue that even in the categories of substance and quality — where you do need general terms to say everything you want to say — you nevertheless don't need real universal things in the world, he has to turn to a different kind of argument entirely. Here, in effect, he has to reject the “picture theory” even in its sophisticated, “deep structure” form.

Peter Abelard, in the twelfth century, will in effect do the same thing. He does not have any program of reducing the number of categories in the world by paraphrasing them away, as Ockham seems to have had, so that the situation with Abelard won't look a lot like the situation with Ockham later on. But still, Abelard — like Ockham — is going to reject the “picture theory” entirely, no matter how sophisticated a form it might take on.

With that, then, let us now turn to the next main period: to Abelard and the whole cluster of people around him.

First, a warning: We are now in the twelfth century, and by the twelfth century we begin to find a problem that will only get worse as we go along. Up to the twelfth century, you can count the people of philosophical significance in the Middle Ages on the fingers of one hand (Augustine, Boethius, Anselm — although only Boethius on the problem of universals). But now their number begins to grow enormously. There are lots of people to keep straight all of a sudden, and sometimes we don't know very much about them, so it's all the harder to do so. This phenomenon is part and parcel of a revival of education in the Latin West, after a period of serious decline following the collapse of pagan antiquity. During this period, various kinds of schools began to be organized around monasteries (actually, that had happened long before, but many such schools were re-organized and beefed up during the eleventh and twelfth centuries), around cathedrals, and even around individual teachers. Out of all these educational institutions grew the universities of the thirteenth century, one of the two

enduring legacies of the Middle Ages to us today. (The other one is Parliament. You may or may not want to include the hierarchical form of the Church as a third “surviving” medieval legacy, depending on what you think happened during the Reformation.) (Here is a HANDOUT containing a kind of diagram showing the interrelations of a number of people during this period. DISTRIBUTE HANDOUT “RELATIONS OF INFLUENCE IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY.”)

With that preliminary, I want now to turn to Roscelin. I’ve already said a little about Roscelin. He was the one St. Anselm criticized as being a tritheist. Roscelin was said to be a nominalist to such an extent that there was not even a shared divine nature common to the three persons of the Trinity. Each was a separate and distinct God.

What little we know about Roscelin indicates that he lived from roughly 1050 to 1120. He was therefore slightly younger than St. Anselm, who lived from 1033 to 1109, and about thirty years older than Abelard, who lived from 1079 to 1142. There is some indication that Roscelin taught Abelard for a while, but this is uncertain.

So Roscelin serves as a kind of transition figure between the generation of St. Anselm (and Odo of Tournai) and the time of Abelard. But that is not the main reason I want to bring him up now. The main reason is that Roscelin will help us to understand what to expect from Abelard’s own view. And, believe me, we’re going to need all the help we can get with that.

For an interesting study of Roscelin, see Eike-Henner W. Kluge, “Roscelin and the Medieval Problem of Universals,” referred to in the handout on “Reserves” I distributed out at the beginning of this course. A copy is available in the “Articles” (Bibliography) subfolder of our “Resources” page on Oncourse.

Peter King, in his dissertation, also discusses Roscelin and criticizes Kluge’s paper, I think on good grounds. Basically, King’s criticism is that Kluge’s paper tries to derive more theory than is warranted by the available sources. In other words, it exhibits a common professional failing in this business: an unwillingness to say I don’t know. But, having said that, the paper is still very useful.

There is some more recent work on Roscelin which seems to indicate that we may have more sources than we thought. But the situation is still unclear. (See Constant Mews, “Nominalism and Theology before Abaelard: New Light on Roscelin of Compiègne,” available in the same subfolder on Oncourse)

One of our main sources for Roscelin, apart from Anselm, is a certain John of Salisbury. John of Salisbury is a later figure in the twelfth century — he died sometime after 1170. He is not an especially important philosopher in his own

right, although he did have some philosophical views. But what he is mainly useful for is the information he provides us about the other important people of his day. And he provides us with a lot of information about that! John of Salisbury wrote an important work, with the intriguing title *Metalogicon* (which is not at all about “metalogue,” but is instead a kind of diatribe about the teaching methods of John’s day, and about the proper role of the various liberal arts). Well, in this work there is a passage in which he discusses the various current theories of universals. The passage is in *Metalogicon*, II, Ch. 17. There are some brief comments on the Daniel D. McGarry translation in the first part of *Notes and Texts*. (The translation itself is not in the public domain. Nevertheless, it is readily available in libraries, and in Arthur Hyman and James J. Walsh, ed., *Philosophy in the Middle Ages: The Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Traditions*, 2nd ed. (there is a more recent 3rd ed. that omits the passage), (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), pp. 167–69. Page references below will be to this last source.).

We will have occasion to refer to this passage several times. For the present, the important point to notice is that John of Salisbury contrasts Roscelin’s view on universals with Abelard’s. We can use his remarks therefore as a way of getting into Abelard.

John tells us (handout, p. 167) that for Roscelin, universals were mere “word sounds,” as the translation reads. The Latin here is ‘voces’, which is the plural of ‘vox’.

That is, for Roscelin there are general terms, general in the sense that they are predicable of many things, but there are no general or universal realities corresponding to them — that is, general in the way a metaphysical universal is supposed to be general. Roscelin, in short, is a nominalist.

The term ‘vox’ is important here. In his letter *On the Incarnation of the Word* (see the handout “Selections from Anselm’s Correspondence concerning Roscelin,” distributed earlier, line 36 on p. 5), Anselm says that for Roscelin (whom he does not mention by name, but merely identified as one of the “dialecticians of our time”) universals were mere “flatus vocis” (‘flatus’ is a fourth declension noun, so that the plural is also ‘flatus’. In that passage, I translated ‘flatus vocis’ as “verbal puffs.” It can also be translated “verbal farts,” which is probably more what Anselm had in mind. The medievals were hardly delicate about these things.

A ‘vox’ then is simply any sound uttered by the vocal apparatus of an animal — and therefore excludes the stamping of feet and the breaking of trees, as a certain later author rather colorfully puts it — and that can be written down, that is, spelled, thus ruling out sneezes and coughs, and so on. (This last is what is sometimes meant by saying that a vox is an articulate sound. But this terminology was not firmly fixed in the Middle Ages.)

In short, 'vox' can pretty accurately be translated as "utterance." Although that is sometimes a clumsy translation, it's certainly a correct one as far as getting the right sense is concerned.

Now the crucial point here is that a vox need not mean anything, it doesn't have to be significant. Sometimes, later authors would give the example 'bu ba blitrix', which doesn't mean any more in Latin than it does in English, but which is a perfectly good vox.

John of Salisbury (who does mention Roscelin by name) contrasts Roscelin's stand on universals with Abelard's. If Roscelin says that universals are nothing but voices, Abelard instead says they are sermones — plural of sermo. The word is hard to translate very well (in the John of Salisbury translation, p. 167, it is translated "verbal concepts"), but basically for Abelard it means a significant or meaningful vox. In a sense, at least as I read him, Abelard is going to turn out to be a nominalist, as Roscelin was alleged to be. For both of them, there are going to be no universal things in the metaphysical sense of the word. There are only going to be universal terms, universal words that are universal only in the quite different sense that they are predicated of many things.

But whereas for Roscelin, a universal might be (according to the description of his view in Anselm and John of Salisbury, anyway) just any old utterance, Abelard is going to insist on the significance of those utterances. In short, for Abelard, there are no metaphysical universals in the world, and yet our general terms are grounded in the world. Abelard, then, is going to try to face up to the epistemological difficulties of nominalism.

If John of Salisbury is right in his sketch of Roscelin, then Roscelin just didn't care whether a vox is significant or not. (Otherwise the contrast with Abelard loses its point.) What Roscelin leaves out of his account is how thought or language is significant, how it links up with the world. As far as Roscelin's doctrine goes — or at least as far as John's description of it goes — everything in the world is singular, and if that compromises our knowledge, so much the worse for knowledge. It is very doubtful that Roscelin himself ever said anything like that, but this is the description that other people, like John of Salisbury, gave of his view. It is this side of things that Abelard will try to fix up.

With that, then, let us turn to Abelard, the second major figure in our study.

First of all, I should call your attention once again to Peter King's elaborate Ph.D. dissertation, "Peter Abailard and the Problem of Universals," a copy of which is on reserve in the main library. King discusses passages and texts from a wide

range of Abelard's writings, and he translates many of them in Volume 2 of the dissertation.

For our purposes, however, we are going to concentrate on one passage only, part of his *Glosses on Porphyry*, contained in his big work called the *Logica ingredientibus*. The relevant passage is translated in *Five Texts*. And, as we are discussing it, you'll want to follow along closely in the outline provided in the *Notes and Texts* (pp. 17–20) — it gets complicated.

The *Logica ingredientibus* is so called because its first word is '*ingredientibus*'. The actual words '*Logica ingredientibus*' can be translated "Logic for Beginners." But that is not the way the title should be translated, although that is sometimes done. The work is a logic for beginners, as the opening lines make clear, but that is not what the title means. The title just means "The *Logic* with the First Word '*Ingredientibus*'."

Let me warn you about this work. It was edited and published in 1919 by Bernhard Geyer, along with a number of other logical texts by Abelard. But the edition is based on a single manuscript, which is all Geyer had to work with at the time. Since then, however, scholars have located further copies of this work, and it has become clear that the *Logica ingredientibus* is badly in need of being reedited. Peter King is involved in a project to do just that, and the finished edition eventually will appear in the *Corpus Christianorum* series. In the meantime, we have to rely on the Geyer edition and just do the best we can.

The passage translated in *Five Texts* is from the "Glosses on Porphyry," in the *Logica ingredientibus*, and in particular from the glosses on the famous passage from the *Isagoge* where Porphyry raises but declines to discuss the famous three questions we've seen before:

- (a) Whether genera and species subsist or are purely mental?
- (b) If they subsist, are they corporeal or incorporeal?
- (c) If they are incorporeal, do they exist in corporeal things, as a geometrical line does, or separated from corporeal things, as God and the angels do? (The examples are Abelard's own interpolation. Porphyry doesn't give any.)

(See paras. (4)–(6) of the Abelard translation, on p. 26.)

To these three classic questions, Abelard adds a fourth of his own. Notice first of all that this is a pretty nervy thing to do. It's a little like adding an eleventh commandment of your own to the classic ten. In any event, Abelard's fourth question is found in para. (10), p. 27:

- (d) Would genera and species exist even if there were no individuals? (That's not a quotation, but that's what the passage comes to.) For instance, would the species rose exist if there were no roses?

Note that this is a very good question.

Recall how in Boethius's *Second Commentary on Porphyry*, we had a basically nominalist theory supplemented by a theory of "abstraction" that was supposed to explain how our knowledge is nevertheless based on reality, and is not just an arbitrary fabrication on our part.

Abelard's own theory is going to belong to the same broad school of thought, although there will be big differences.

Recall also how there were really two notions of a universal that we found in Boethius. The first and more important one for Boethius himself and for the Middle Ages generally was the notion we found in the *Second Commentary on Porphyry*, the metaphysical notion according to which a universal was something that is shared by or common to several things as a whole, simultaneously and in a peculiar metaphysically intimate way.

But I also pointed out that in his *Second Commentary on the De interpretatione*, Boethius defined a universal, following Aristotle's *De interpretatione* 7, as what is apt to be predicated of many. This logical or predication notion of a universal we didn't dwell on much in connection with Boethius. But now it becomes important. For it is in terms of this notion of a universal that Abelard sets up his statement of the problem of universals. (But don't be misled. The Boethian metaphysical notion is not far away in Abelard's discussion, as we shall see.)

Universals are predicated of many, Aristotle says, while singulars are not. As I commented back when I mentioned this passage in connection with Boethius, the last part of that claim is strictly speaking ambiguous. It could mean that singulars are predicated of one thing only, as opposed to many things. Or it could mean that singulars are not the kinds of things that can be predicated at all — as, for example, in the Categories where Aristotle says that individuals are neither present in nor said of anything else.

Well, Abelard breaks this possible ambiguity by citing Porphyry, who says that the individual or singular is what is predicated of one thing only. (Abelard, para. (16), p. 28. Compare Porphyry, paras. (8), (35).)

So for Abelard the entire difference between universals and individuals is put in terms of predication: Universals are predicated of several things, whereas individuals are predicated only of one.

Now of course we have to ask: What kind of relation is this predication? What sorts of things do we say are predicated, whether predicated of many things or predicated of one only?

Well, as we've talked about before, at one level predication is a matter of language. We say terms are predicated. We either say they are predicated of things, or of other terms.

But there may be more to it than that. Is this predication relation in language based on and derived from a more basic metaphysical relation that we might also call a kind of "predication," a relation between entities? If so, then the fact that in language we have terms that are predicated of many things — terms like 'man' or 'animal' — would correspond to the fact that on the side of reality there is a single entity (*man* or *animal*, depending on which case we're talking about), related to several individuals in a way that is mirrored by the facts of predication in language. And that entity would be a universal — not just a universal term or word but a universal piece of the ontology of the world. It might even be, depending on the details of your theory, a universal in the metaphysical sense we saw in Boethius's *Second Commentary on Porphyry* — something present as a whole and simultaneously to several things in a peculiar metaphysically intimate way.

Of course, this is just the "picture theory" I talked about a little while ago, and said was one strand in the argument for realism.

Well, this is the way Abelard sets up the problem of universals. Of course there are words that are predicated of many. That is just an undeniable and quite non-controversial fact about language. What we want to know is: Are there in addition things that are predicated of many? Do the facts of general predication in language accurately mirror an ontological relation in the world?

An affirmative answer is realism. A negative one is nominalism.

Notice two things here:

- (a) This is not the way we set up the problem of universals in Boethius — even though the predication notion of a universal can also be found in Boethius. In Boethius's *Second Commentary on Porphyry* there was no discussion of predication at all; it was all put in terms of "sharing" or "having in common." This means that we have two notions of "universals" here, and we have to keep them sorted out in our minds. We can't just assume that realism in the one sense automatically entails realism in the other sense, or

conversely. That remains to be seen. (The fact remains, however, that for most authors the two senses did go together, whether they did so automatically or not.)

- (b) In terms of the predicational notion of a universal, it is easy to see what is “nominal” about “nominalism.” For nominalism, universals are only names — “*nomina*” — that is, pieces of language, not pieces of the world. Nevertheless, although it is easy to see the appropriateness of the terminology, we should not think the term ‘nominalism’ first arose in this sense. As I’ve remarked before, the true history of that term is still very obscure. (For some very interesting remarks on this, you may want to look at two exceptionally interesting papers by Calvin Normore. One is “The Tradition of Mediaeval Nominalism.”⁴ The other is “Abelard and the School of the *Nominales*.”⁵)

Abelard goes on to cite some authoritative texts in Aristotle and Boethius for this kind of “predication” terminology (paras. (20)–(21), p. 29). That is, he wants to reassure us, he is not engaging in neologism here.

Then he turns (after a transitional paragraph (22), p. 29) to a consideration of various realist theories current in Abelard’s own day. After refuting these views to his own satisfaction (pp. 29–37), he will set out his own theory (beginning on p. 37).

Although Abelard doesn’t say so explicitly here, in fact his main target in these discussions is one of his own former teachers, a certain William of Champeaux (whose name you should get down). William was at one time Master of the cathedral school at Paris, and later of the monastic school of St. Victor just outside Paris.

Now William held two different theories of universals at different points in his career. The reason he changed his mind is described by Abelard himself in his *Story of My Adversities* (). Here is part of what he says on pp. 15–18, and it gives you a good idea of what Abelard must have been like to deal with:

⁴ Calvin Normore, “The tradition of Mediaeval Nominalism,” in John Wippel, ed., *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), pp. 201–217.

⁵ C. G. Normore, “Abelard and the School of the *Nominales*,” *Vivarium* 30 (1992), pp. 80–96.

My teacher William, archdeacon of Paris, had changed his state [that is, he had entered religious orders] and entered the Order of Regular Clerics⁶ for the purpose, it was said, of being considered more pious and thereby of gaining promotion to the rank of a major prelacy, as happened when he was made bishop of Châlons....

At that time [that is, after he entered orders, not after he became bishop of Châlons] I returned to him to hear him lecturing on rhetoric. Among other essays at discussion I forced him by clear proofs from reasoning to change, yes, to abandon his old stand on universals.... He subsequently so modified his position as to assert that [blah blah blah] ... Once William had corrected, yes under compulsion had abandoned his position, his lectures bogged down into such carelessness that they could scarcely be called lectures on logic at all [I thought Abelard just said they were on rhetoric.]...

From then on my teaching gained such strength and prestige that those who formerly had somewhat vigorously championed the position of our master [that is, of William] and had most forcefully attacked mine now flocked to my school and even he [no one knows who this was] who had taken over the chair of our master in the cathedral school of Paris offered his place to me that along with the other students he might follow my lectures right where our common master had held sway. Within a few days after my taking over the chair of dialectics, envy began to eat the heart out of my master and anguish to seize him to a degree I can hardly express [although he seems to me to be expressing it rather forcefully]...

So Abelard was a pupil of William's, and when William was presenting his theory of universals — that is, his first theory of universals — Abelard so hectoring him, raising one objection after another, that William finally just had to give up his view. He then adopted a second, revised view, and Abelard apparently attacked him on that too. Finally, as Abelard says, William had to give up the question altogether, and his "lectures bogged down into carelessness."

In his *Adversities*, Abelard says enough about William's own views (in the parts I've skipped over) to make it pretty plain that William is the target of the

⁶ I'm not sure what this refers to.

arguments in the *Logica ingredientibus*. (We have almost nothing from William himself on this topic.)

So first we get an extended treatment of William's first theory, and then of William's second theory and several variations of it held by various other people.

Both of these views we have seen before, in Boethius. Once again, I suspect that all theories of universals ever held can be found in some non-trivial sense in Boethius, at least in germ.

We shall soon see that the situation is far more subtle than this, but to a first approximation we can say that Abelard's attack on William's first view is a metaphysical one. He thinks the theory is a metaphysically impossible one. And, as we would expect from what I've said so far about the historical line-ups on these things, William's first theory was a realist one.

Abelard's attack on the second theory is different. In effect — again to a first approximation, since, again, we shall see that the situation is far more subtle than this — Abelard thinks the second theory is perfectly all right — although he doesn't think it is the whole story and although he does have some quarrels with the way it is expressed. It's just that, contrary to what its adherents maintain, there is nothing realist about the theory. So it is not what it purports to be.

Let us then look first at William of Champeaux's first theory (beginning on p. 29 in para. (23)). (This runs through §§ (23)–(27).)

It is generally conceded by many scholars — for instance, by Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, vol. 2 — that Abelard's attacks on William of Champeaux's first theory were devastating, that he thoroughly refuted William's brand of realism.

Well, historically he may have caused William to change his mind. But I am going to argue, on the contrary, that not a single one of the arguments Abelard gives here is conclusive against a realism like William of Champeaux's, although they perhaps are telling criticisms against a certain confused version of that theory. (Perhaps the confused version was what William himself actually held, but the point stands: There were ways he could have defended himself.)

But I wouldn't want this point to be overstated. While William's theory can be defended against the arguments Abelard gives, it is probably also true that Abelard's objections can be presented in a stronger form than he actually gives them. So the question "Who wins?" is by no means settled.

William of Champeaux's First Theory

Consider the structure of an individual — say, of the individual man Socrates. Well, Socrates is a substance, and so has substantiality. He is a body (that is, a physical object), and so he has corporeality. He is an organism, and so has life. He is an animal, and so has animality. He is a man (a rational animal), and so has rationality (and therefore humanity — that is, rational animality). He is a Greek, the teacher of Plato, snub-nosed and so on. And so he has all those features too. Socrates is a kind of metaphysical layer-cake built up part by part in this way. We have here, therefore, a laminated view of individuals.

Now consider Plato. He has many of the same features as Socrates has. In particular, he has the same features up to and including Greekness. But he has some different features too; they are what differentiate him from Socrates.

Finally, let us consider “Brunellus” — that is, Brownie the Ass, Abelard's favorite example of an irrational animal. Brownie has many of the same structural features Socrates and Plato have: substantiality, corporeality, life, animality. But he does not have rationality and humanity. Instead, he has irrationality and asininity. (HANDOUT THE FULL PICTURE OF BRUNELLUS.)

Now — **and this is the key point:** If you start with Socrates and Plato, and take away all their features after humanity, what do you have left, one humanity or two? Is the humanity Socrates has his own, so that if you were to pull everything else off, so to speak, until you got down to the level of humanity, you would have two humanities left over — one for Socrates and one for Plato — or is there something one that is shared, some one humanity, so that when you pull off all the features that distinguish Socrates from Plato, you end up with one universal humanity?

William of Champeaux's first view answered: You have only one humanity, and it is common to and shared by them both. William's first theory, then, is a form of realism in the metaphysical sense we discussed in connection with Boethius. (As near as I can tell from Abelard's description of William's first theory, William simply didn't distinguish between the Boethian “metaphysical” notion of a universal and the Aristotelian “predicational” notion of a universal. Otherwise Abelard's nice description of William's realism in the Boethian “metaphysical” sense would be simply irrelevant to the problem of universals as Abelard has raised it — that is, is in the “predicational” sense.)

(Note: This little “plucked chicken” thought experiment turns out to be a pretty good test for this kind of realism. It is because Plato's doctrine (with the seal-ring

analogy) fails this test that I earlier called him a nominalist. And notice also that it's not hard to see that the thought experiment is just another way of asking the question I asked at the beginning of this course in connection with the chalk-trick.)

Similarly, if you go somewhat deeper and pull off rationality, so that you break up the humanity you had, still you find something that is common to and shared by Socrates and Plato, on the one hand, and by Brownie the Ass, on the other: namely, animality. And similarly if we go yet deeper. On all this see the handout on Boethius's "Layer-Cake Ontology." That theory is exactly the one we have here in William.

But William apparently said more — and here we get some special terminology. In each case where you find something common like this, it acts, so to speak, like matter with respect to the later forms — what William called "advening forms" according to para. (27), p. 30. And so, according to Abelard, William calls this common matter-like layer the "material essence" (para. (23), p. 29), as opposed to the "advening forms," which are attached to it.

Note several things about this theory and its terminology:

(1) The talk of "matter" here is probably meant as an analogy. William is saying (or Abelard is saying that William is saying) that the genus is like matter with respect to the species. How is it like matter? Insofar as it is indeterminate and indefinite, and is determined or narrowed down to a species by a determining difference. Aristotle talks this way sometimes in the *Metaphysics*: the genus is like matter and the difference is like form. See, for example, *Metaphysics* v 28 1024^b8–9; vii 12 1038^a8; x 8 1057^b38 & 1058^a23. But of course the *Metaphysics* had not been translated yet and William of Champeaux could not have got this terminology from there. He could well have got it, however, from Porphyry, and from Boethius's *Commentary on Porphyry*. They talk this way too.

For example, Porphyry, *Isagoge*, para. (69):

Also, genus is like matter, while difference is like form.

Again, a little earlier (para. (51)):

Just as things consist of matter and form, or have a structure analogous to matter and form — for instance, a statue is made up of matter (the bronze) and form (the shape) — so too the specific man in common consists of an analogue of matter, the genus, and of difference as a form. The whole, rational mortal animal, is man — just as for the statue.

As long as things stay at this metaphorical level, it is not clear whether the doctrine of matter — that is, literal, real matter, not some kind of analogy — has any role in this theory at all.

Peter King, in Ch. 6 of his dissertation, has a very interesting discussion of this “Material Essence Realism,” as it has come to be called. (Ch. 6 as a whole is entitled “William of Champeaux and Material Essence Realism.”)

King points out that, besides the passage in the *Glosses on Porphyry* (our paras. (23)–(27)), where Abelard describes this theory, there are also other sources too for our understanding of “Material Essence Realism.” There is:

- (a) Another passage from a later work of Abelard.
- (b) A passage from Pseudo-Joscelin of Soissons, who did not hold this theory, but describes it. (We will meet him shortly.)
- (c) A passage from Walter of Mortagne. (We’ll meet him too shortly.)

King translates the relevant passages from all these people in volume 2 of his dissertation.

He also points out there may be a sense in which Material Essence Realism’s claim that the genus is matter is not just a metaphor — that is, it is not just that genus is indefinite and indeterminate as matter is. Genus may also be regarded as “matter” in the sense that is a material cause of the species — the raw material out of which the species is constructed. King discusses some of the implications of this possibility. (A good possible paper topic.)

(2) On this kind of analysis, if you ask what the essence (the “material essence”) is of Socrates or Plato, or of Brownie the Ass, the answer is: That depends. It depends on how deeply you want to push the analysis. At one level, humanity is the “essence” of both Socrates and Plato, the common essence that acts as a kind of matter for — underlies — further “advening” forms that differentiate Socrates from Plato. At a deeper level, however, animality is the “essence” of Socrates and Plato, and also of Brownie the Ass. It acts as matter for the further forms that differentiate all three of them.

As a result, the difference between substance or essence, on the one hand, and accident, on the other, is not really at home here. You have a kind of “sliding” notion of essence. What may be an “advening” accidental form at one level of analysis may be “essential” at another level.

Note: Abelard conspicuously does not use the term ‘accident’ in stating the view, although he does in attacking it. (Walter of Mortagne does use the term ‘accident’.) The closest term Abelard uses is “advening form.” My point is that perhaps we shouldn’t be too Aristotelian when we read this “essence” talk.

(3) The common essence is a universal in Boethius’s sense of the term. This is quite explicit in Abelard’s discussion. See para. (27), lines 3–5, where in describing William’s theory of universals, he refers back to Boethius’s famous description:

...the universal is common, Boethius says, in such a way that the same whole is *at the same time* in diverse things, of which it constitutes the substance materially.”

(Boethius of course doesn’t say “materially.”

(4) We’ve seen this “layer-cake” theory before, of course, in a slightly different terminology. Look at the first part of text (2) from the *Theological Tractates* in the *Notes and Texts* (from Boethius’s *De trinitate*). This is the passage with the claim that “it is the variety of accidents that makes for difference in number,” and is the basis for the little diagram I handed out earlier on “Boethius’s ‘Layer-Cake’ Ontology.” (**Note:** Boethius does say ‘accidents’ in the *Tractates*, even if William says only ‘advening forms’.) Recall how the status of matter — that is, matter literally, not in the analogical sense — was unclear on that view.

(5) William wasn’t the only one to hold this kind of theory in the twelfth century. It was also held at the so called School of Chartres by a certain Clarembald of Arras. (Pseudo-Joscelin and Walter of Mortagne didn’t hold it, although they did describe it.)

The School of Chartres was a “school” or “group” of thinkers associated with the cathedral at Chartres. There is some question about whether there was ever really anything so formal as a full-fledged “school” there, but it is clear in any event that there were surely several people who tended to be associated with Chartres and with one another. For a little more on the School of Chartres, you may want see “The Course in the Box,” Ver. 2.0, Vol. 1, Chaps. 34 & 36.

I’ve given you a text from Clarembald at the end of the section “Passages From the School of Chartres” in the *Notes and Texts* (pp. 70–71). In that passage — which, incidentally, is from his commentary on Boethius’s *De trinitate* — Clarembald denies that there is any singular humanity — that is, Socrates’s own humanity, for instance, as opposed to and as distinct from Plato’s humanity. Look at para. (13), for example (I took the paragraph numbers from the critical edition):

... nevertheless because certain famous doctors have spread it about that single men are men by singular humanities, even though it does not contribute much to the present tract [= Boethius's *De trinitate*], we have considered it worth the trouble to show that it is one and the same humanity by which single men are men.

Then he goes on to give a curious argument in favor of this view, which I will not delay over now (because I don't really understand it).

Well, this is William of Champeaux's first theory of universals. Now let's look at Abelard's objections to it. (Please consult the outline in the *Notes and Texts*, pp. 17–20.)

First Objection (para. (29))

Contraries cannot be in the same thing at the same time. Indeed, that is more or less the definition of contrariety. For example, being white (all over) and being black (all over) are contraries. No one thing can be both white and black (all over) at the same time. But, the objection continues, on William's view contraries would inhere in the same thing at the same time. For instance, both rationality and irrationality would inhere in animality at the same time. And rationality and irrationality are contraries. If they did not both inhere in animality at the same time, then you could not have the rational Socrates and the irrational Brownie the Ass existing at the same time — because, on this theory, it is the same (one) animality in them both. In short, this first view of William's, the objection says, violates the Law of Contraries, and so must be rejected.

(As you may recall, I in effect raised this argument myself at the beginning of this course when I was arguing the case for nominalism. We're now going to look at it in detail.)

First Reply to Objection 1 (para. (30))

As it stands, there is a reply to this argument, and Abelard knows it. The obvious answer is that the Law of Contraries ("Two contraries cannot inhere in the same thing at the same time") was never intended to rule out this kind of thing. Rather, it means only that two contraries cannot inhere in the same individual at the same time. And William's first theory does doesn't violate the Law of Contraries understood like that. Animality may have both rationality and irrationality at the same time, but no one individual animal does.

In effect, this reply proceeds by specifying that when the Law of Contraries says that two contraries cannot “inhere” in the same thing at the same time, this means only that they cannot both belong at the same time to anything higher on the metaphysical “layer-cake,” not that they cannot belong to something on a lower level.

Refutation of the First Reply to Objection 1 (paras. (31)–(33))

Abelard anticipates this reply (para. (30)) and tries to counter it. He argues that, given William’s theory, it is not only the case that contraries inhere in the same universal thing at the same time. Abelard in effect grants, for the sake of the argument, that this would not after all violate the Law of Contraries properly understood. But things are worse than that. It turns out, Abelard thinks, that on William of Champeaux’s view contraries would inhere in the same individual at the same time. And that clearly does violate the Law.

But why on earth does he think this would follow from William’s view? Well, here is his argument (paras. (31)–(33)). Let me just state it first, and then we’ll talk about the individual steps.

- (1) Socrates is identical with whatever is in Socrates other than the (advening) forms of Socrates. In other words, Socrates is identical with his material essence. (I said we’d talk about the argument later.)
- (2) So too, Brownie the Ass is identical with its material essence — that is, the ass is whatever is in the ass other than the (advening) forms of the ass. (These first two steps are very strange.)
- (3) But whatever is in Socrates other than the forms of Socrates is the same as whatever is in the ass other than the forms of the ass. That is, the material essence of Brownie is identical with the material essence of Socrates.
- ∴ (4) Hence, Socrates is identical with Brownie the Ass.
- ∴ (5) And since rationality inheres in Socrates and irrationality in the ass, it follows from (4) that they both inhere in Socrates. Q. E. D.

Plainly the argument is valid, but the premises need a little talking through, to say the least. Let us begin with (3), which is the easiest. Clearly, there is some level at which (3) is true — for example, the level of animality. It is both a material

essence of Socrates and a material essence of Brownie, and is one and the same in each. So the force of this argument rests on the very strange premises (1) and (2). Why on earth would William ever want to say that Socrates is identical with his material essence animality, and that Brownie the ass is likewise identical with his material essence, the same animality? The straightforward interpretation of William's view would be that the individual is in every case to be identified with the sum total of all its forms, including, at any given level of analysis, the material essence together with all its advening forms. The individual is the product of this composite layering process, not some intermediate stage along the way. (And in fact it was the view that the individual is this sum total of all its forms that gave rise to my objection about how this kind of "individuation by accidents" in connections with Boethius ends up eliminating all accidental change.)

But Abelard thinks he can block the interpretation that identifies the individual with the end result of the layering process. See para. (33) ("The fact that what we assumed above is true ... is plain because," etc.). Here is his argument: The individual can be identified with either

- (a) The matter (understand: the material essence, at some stage of analysis).
- (b) The forms (understand: the advening forms, at some stage of analysis). Or
- (c) Both (a) and (b) together, the sum total of all the forms, both those counted in the material essence and those counted as "advening" forms.

Alternative (c), of course, is the one William no doubt intended, and is probably the most plausible alternative in any case. But Abelard wants to rule out (c), and also (b), leaving only (a), which would give us premises (1) and (2) of the previous argument. Here is how he proceeds:

Ad (b): If the individual is identified with its advening forms, then in that case accidents would be substance. That is, the individual substance — say, Socrates — would be identified with his accidents.

This would of course follow only if William's "advening forms" are to be taken as accidents. Now there is some evidence from another work of Abelard's, his *Dialectica*, that William did in fact talk this way. The passage is translated in the *Notes and Texts*, on pp. 65–66. The key passage here is at the very end (lines 24–26), where Abelard claims that William wanted to say that essential differences (*differentiae*) inhere accidentally ("as accidents") in their genera. That is, rationality is just as accidental to animality, in this sense, as being snub-nosed or

being seated is to humanity. But the latter are paradigm instances of accidents. The evidence is hardly definitive, but if Abelard's remark here is correct, then William perhaps did regard his "advening forms" as accidents.

Now in order to refute (b) above, as Abelard wants to do, we must all agree that substances cannot be identified with accidents, as they would have to be on this alternative. Of course, if we are being Aristotelians, this follows simply from our standard terminological usage. Substance and accidents are in a sense opposites; they could scarcely be identified. It is not so clear that it follows, however, given William's own rather non-Aristotelian use of the term 'accident' — to stand for the "advening forms" of a strongly realist theory. But in any case, whether it follows or not, we don't have to worry about alternative (b). William certainly did not want to identify an individual with its advening forms. He would no doubt have been willing to grant Abelard that alternative (b) should be rejected.

Ad (c): This is surely the alternative William would want to adopt. The individual is to be identified with the its material essence plus the sum total of all its (advening) forms. But Abelard argues, if this is so then Then what? Well, unfortunately, at this crucial point (p. 32, the end of para. (33), where I have inserted footnote #13), there are textual problems with the Latin edition of this work.

As I remarked before, when Bernhard Geyer did his critical edition of Abelard's *Logica ingredientibus*, there was only one known surviving manuscript of the work (it's in Milan) — and even that does not contain the whole thing. The new critical edition, based on subsequently discovered manuscripts, has not been completed yet, and I don't know what the other manuscripts say at this point. But Geyer claims that at this point in the text the manuscript reads something that can be translated as:

since then it would be necessary to allow that body is body.

But of course body is body! That's a tautology; it's hardly a good basis for an objection to alternative (c) to say that a tautology follows from it. Because of this textual problem, Geyer conjectured that the text had to be emended at this point. He suggested an emendation that makes the passage read:

since then it would be necessary to allow that body and non-body are body.

Now, it may very well be the case that we can construct an argument against alternative (c) on the basis of this emended passage. I tried to do that in "The Course in the Box," Ver. 2.0, Vol. I, Chap. 40, p. 9. But, while I did come up with

an argument, I had to admit that it was not a very good one. And it must be emphasized that there is no manuscript authority whatever for Geyer's conjectural emendation, and so not for any argument reconstructed on the basis of it, either my own or anyone else's.

Well, Peter King, while he was writing his dissertation, took the trouble actually to check the manuscript again. What he found is that the manuscript does not say what Geyer says it does, and that in fact an emendation is perhaps not needed at all. The text as it stands in the manuscript is strained in any event. But it is possible, without changing it in any way, to make it say something like this:

since then it would be necessary to allow that body and something that is already a body would be a body.

That is the text King adopts, and translates in vol. 2 of his dissertation (§ 17 of his translation). There was an earlier translation too, by Richard McKeon. It's reprinted in Hyman and Walsh and follows Geyer's conjectural emendation at this point. So there is an important difference here between the McKeon translation and Peter King's translation (apart from the fact that Peter's is much better throughout): at this point in the text they are translating different Latin words. In my own translation in *Five Texts*, I have followed Peter King's version of the Latin — since it, after all, is what Geyer's manuscript actually has.

On this whole question, see King's dissertation, Chap. 6, especially pp. 155–57.

So, following Peter's version of the Latin, the manuscript says that if (alternative (c)) an individual is to be identified with the combination of its material essence plus its advening forms — the whole thing — then that won't do, "since then it would be necessary to allow that body and something already a body are a body."

What on earth kind of argument does that give us? Well, King suggests — although this is all tentative — that Abelard is implicitly setting up a kind of infinite regress argument here, and that he is appealing to another feature of William of Champeaux's theory in order to make the argument run.

Again, if you want to follow this out, look at Chap. 6 of his dissertation. I don't want to go into the details of this argument just here. We will come back to it a little later.

But for the present, note: If Abelard's argument here is based not only on the identification of an individual with the combination of its material essence plus its advening forms, but also on some other feature of William's doctrine that we haven't fully discussed yet, then perhaps it is open to William to defend himself by simply changing that other feature of his doctrine.

In other words, perhaps Abelard's argument is not really an argument against "Material Essence Realism" as such, but only against a particular version of it as held by William, and that perhaps "Material Essence Realism" could be saved by adjusting these other points. And that is in fact, I think, the real situation.

In any event, let's go on with the argument, and then come back to fill in this point later.

Abelard thinks he has refuted alternatives **(b)** and **(c)**, so that only alternative **(a)** remains: the individual is to be identified with its material essence, to the exclusion of the advening forms. This gives him what he needs to defend premises **(1)** and **(2)** of his refutation of the first reply to Objection 1.

There is still a problem, however. Abelard should have recognized that the notion of "material essence" on William's view was a sliding notion, relative to the depth of the analysis, as we have already discussed. There is no one form or group of forms that is the material essence; it depends on how deep you go. Does Abelard's argument then force us to conclude that William's individual is identical with all those forms that might, at some level of analysis, be called its "material essence"? That certainly seems hopeless.

On the other hand, if not, then how are we to pick out one such form or group of forms and identify the individual with it? Abelard might well reply: Don't ask me! It's not my theory.

Let me summarize the result of all this. I think the main problem here is that we have a terminology of matter, essence and accident that comes ultimately from Aristotle, and was known to the Middle Ages through Boethius's translations of and commentaries on Aristotle and Porphyry, and through his own independent logical writings. With this terminology comes a set of terminological conventions: substances cannot be identified with accidents, and so on. On the other hand, the doctrine we are now dealing with just doesn't fit that terminology and those conventions very well. Abelard's objections so far apply only to a badly formulated version of "Material Essence Realism." Such a realism can perhaps be defended against Abelard's attacks by simply getting straight on the terminology, and getting straight on what is and what is not implied by the doctrine.

Conclusion: The first reply to Objection 1 is a good reply, and Abelard's refutation of it fails. Abelard has not succeeded in showing that contraries inhere in the same individual, and so has not succeeded in showing there is any violation of the Law of Contraries, properly understood.

Second Reply to the First Objection (para. (34))

Abelard considers a second reply to his first objection, and we can handle it quickly. The objection, once again, was the one about contraries' inhering in the same thing at the same time. The first reply to it said that this wasn't a problem so long as contraries didn't inhere in the same individual. Abelard thought he had blocked that reply, although I don't think he has. In any event, he now considers a second reply. In effect, this second reply accepts Abelard's conclusion of the objection, that on William's first view two contraries are in the same thing at the same time, but says this poses no problem. Animal — that is, the universal, animality — is indeed both rational and irrational, but in virtue of different forms. Animal is not irrational insofar as it has the form rationality, but insofar as it has the form irrationality. Neither is it rational insofar as it has the form irrationality, but insofar as it has the form rationality. (You may recall that at the beginning of this course I mentioned this kind of maneuver as a device some realists would try to use. Well here it is.) I don't know who — if anyone — tried to argue this way in the Middle Ages.

Refutation of the Second Reply to Objection 1 (paras. (35)–(36))

Abelard's response to this is in effect: "So what?" It still remains true that contraries are in the same thing at the same time. And what's so special about these "insofar as" considerations? There is nothing unique about contraries in this respect. Considerations like that apply to all forms. It is not in virtue of redness that the apple is round, but in virtue of roundness. Neither is it in virtue of roundness that it is red, but in virtue of redness. But none of that prevents its still being true that the same apple is both red and round. So too here: the same animality is still both rational and irrational. Nothing is gained by the appeal to these "insofar as" considerations, as though they somehow prevented this outcome.

Abelard's reply seems to me a conclusive refutation of a weak attempt to avoid his first objection. But the success of Abelard's reply here does not allow us to conclude that his original objection stands. The first reply is still open, despite Abelard's argument against it. Contrary forms are not in the same individual at the same time on William's first theory, despite Abelard's peculiar argument that they would be, and so the Law of Contraries, when properly formulated, is left intact.

Abelard's Second objection (para. (37))

Abelard now begins a whole new line of attack. In effect, he is starting over. There would be, he says, only ten essences for all things if William's view were

correct — namely, the ten “*generalissima*” or ten Aristotelian categories. The argument is this: All substances are basically or in the end the same; they all share the common material essence substantiality. And that is indeed true on William’s view. So too, all qualities are basically or in the end the same: redness, greenness, tallness, and the rest, all share the common material essence quality. And so too for all the other Aristotelian categories. Note that the categories are the bottom layer of the ontological layer-cake. They are “*generalissima*” — most general genera. They are the most material of material essences. (The “layer-cake” in a sense goes the opposite direction from the Porphyrian tree, where the categories are at the “top,” at least as the tree is usually drawn.)

Here then is the problem: Take two things — say, Socrates and Plato. They have a selection of features from each of the Aristotelian categories. They have features from the category of substance, others from quality, others from quantity, and so on. Now, on William’s theory, Socrates and Plato are supposed to differ from one another with respect to the peculiar combination of features each has. But — and here comes the punch — any feature the one has turns out, as we have just seen, to be basically or in the end the same as some feature the other has. The Latin here is ‘*penitus*’ — McKeon translates it as “at bottom” in this passage. And that’s a pretty good translation of it, if we ignore the spatial connotations of ‘at bottom’, which are not implied by the Latin. Peter King translates it in his dissertation as ‘exactly’, which seems to me to be not quite right here.

In any event, the point is that, basically or in the end or at bottom Socrates and Plato do not differ at all — not in the category of substance, not in the category of quality, and so on.

Hence, Abelard concludes, all distinctions among things will vanish.

A Possible Reply William Might Have Made (Although There Is No Evidence Whatever That He Actually Did So)

Everything up to the last step is fine. But that last step simply doesn’t follow. Why think there is no more to things than their bases, ends, bottoms? We might very well accept Abelard’s argument, up to and including the step where he says that Socrates and Plato, and in fact any individual, will be basically or in the end or at bottom the same as any other in all the categories. But why conclude from this that Socrates is not distinct from Plato? They differ by their “advening forms,” as we saw right from the beginning. There is a “too-fast” move in Abelard’s argument here.

Abelard's Probable Reply to This Hypothetical Response

There's nothing "too fast" about it at all. I'm only arguing on your own grounds, Bill.

And now look once again at the passage from Abelard's *Dialectica* in the *Notes and Texts* (on pp. 65–66). We mentioned this text a little earlier, when I talked about how William of Champeaux's "advening forms" are probably to be viewed according to William himself as what we would more familiarly call "accidents." We're now in a position to look more carefully at this passage.

Note first of all that in line 20 Abelard says he is describing the view of someone he calls "master W." As I say in n. 7 there, everyone just automatically assumes from what we know about Abelard's life that this refers to William of Champeaux. There's really no more evidence for this than what you see there in the text. But still, it's probably right.

Now here's the point of this passage. Abelard might very well say: You are the one, Bill, who wants to hold not only the standard view that genera are divided by differences — for example, that substance is divided by "corporeal" and "incorporeal." (Recall the Porphyrian tree.) You also want to hold the further semantic thesis that difference-words — for example, the words 'corporeal' and 'incorporeal' as just mentioned — don't just refer to the advening forms (corporeity, incorporeity), but to the combination of the advening form and the underlying genus or material essence. For example, 'rational' just means "rational animal." It follows, of course, that difference-words would then do the job of species-words too. That is, 'corporeal' would not only refer to what is added to the genus substance to get the species corporeal substance, but also refers to the underlying material essence substance itself, so that 'corporeal' MEANS "corporeal substance" — which is the species.

Why is that? Why do you want to maintain this, William? Well, you want to hold this peculiar view because, according to you (lines 24–26, p. 66) if this weren't so, substance would be divided into accidents (that is, the genus or "subject" substance would be so divided).

This would indeed follow, I suppose. If substance is divided into corporeal and incorporeal, and the latter refer only to the advening forms or accidents, then substance is indeed divided into accidents. Just why you think this is so bad, William, given your peculiar use of this terminology, I'm not prepared to say. But after all, it's your theory, not mine.

(Once again, here we see inferences drawn, not from the theory itself, but from an ill-fitting terminology in which the theory is expressed.)

Now let's draw the consequence of all this. If what the passage from the *Dialectica* says about William of Champeaux is not an out and out fabrication, Abelard has him. Here's why:

When you try to define a species in the standard way, as a genus plus a difference, it turns out on William's theory that the difference-word you use is also a species-word. That is, it contains a reference to the genus plus something else. (That's what a species is, after all.) That something else, of course, is the difference. But when you try to say just what this difference is, all you get is another reference back to the original genus plus something else.

Perhaps an example will help. Consider the traditional definition of man as a rational animal. Here 'rational' is the difference-word and 'animal' is the genus-word. But on William's theory, as Abelard describes it in the passage from the *Dialectica*, the word 'rational' not only picks out the differences — that is, what is added to the genus to give you the species (in this case, rationality). It also refers to the product or result you get when you do add the difference to the genus in this way. That is, the difference-word 'rational' here play two semantic roles. In addition to singling out rationality in some way, the difference-word 'rational' also bears some kind of semantic relation to man (it is predicable of it). After all, it is men who are rational animals. The difference-word 'rational' is predicated not of rationality but of people. Rationality isn't rational, men are — that is, rational animals are. Hence, the difference-word 'rational' really "means" rational animal.

But if that is so, then when I define man as a rational animal, I am really saying that man is a rational animal animal, since 'rational' alone already has 'animal' built into it. And of course, 'rational animal animal' can be unpacked one step further, into 'rational animal animal animal', and so on.

The species, then, is ultimately the genus plus something else, which something else is itself the genus plus something else, which something else is again ..., and so on *in infinitum*. Hence in the end, all you have is the genus, over and over again, plus a promissory note that is never really cashed out. And since any genus that is not a most general genus (= a category) is also a species of a higher genus on the layer-cake, any genus other than a category will run into these definitional problems. In short, the only forms there are that are not hopelessly involved in definitional infinite regresses are the ten Aristotelian categories. (And, recall, the categories have no real definitions at all.) Hence, if every individual has features from each of the ten categories, then it really does follow, as my argument claimed (Abelard is speaking again), that there is only one individual, and the distinctions among individuals vanish.

Once again, if this is not an outright distortion of William's view, then Abelard has him. But notice that the objection is not really against William's realism, but rather against his theory of the relation of genus and difference. William might easily revise that view to avoid Abelard's objection without giving up his realism. He can say, for instance, that differences do not after all belong to the genus they differentiate. They are not the original genus plus something else.

This kind of infinite-regress argument is also what Peter King suggests is behind the business about "body and what is already a body is a body" in the earlier argument we discussed from paragraph (33) of the *Glosses on Porphyry*. (I said I would come back to that.) For example, suppose we want to define organism = body + living. Now if the difference 'living' implicitly contains the genus 'body', then to say that an organism is a "living body" would be to say that it is a "living body body" — and so on. We are off on our infinite regress. Hence body (that is, the genus) plus something that is already a body (the difference, "living") would be a body, and in particular an organism.

All this is rather strained, you may think, but it does fit the text of that earlier argument, and is not at all the kind of argument that would be foreign to Abelard and others of his day. What's strained about it is just that, if this is what Abelard meant, he could have put it much more clearly.

In connection with this argument, and with William's doctrine as presented in the passage from the *Dialectica*, you may want to compare *Metaphysics* III.3, where Aristotle argues that being cannot be a genus (see the earlier handout), a sort of "supercategory," since then its differentiae, in order to do their job, would have to be beings, and so fall into the genera they are supposed to differentiate. The presumption, of course, is that differences do not fall into their genera in this way. All this is very difficult stuff in Aristotle, and in any case the *Metaphysics* was not yet translated into Latin, so that it could have had no direct influence whatever on the controversy between Abelard and William of Champeaux.

It seems to me that a more likely background for the dispute here is St. Anselm. Anselm wrote a work *De grammatico*, in which he discussed the semantics of what later medieval authors would call "connotative" terms (although that is not the word Anselm used for them). In that discussion, Anselm explicitly raised the kind of infinite regress considerations we have just seen, in order to argue that words like 'rational' do not contain a reference to their underlying genus. For Anselm, 'rational' does not mean rational animal. Whether or not Anselm had any direct influence on the dispute between William and Abelard, it seems to me that this kind of semantic issue is the real basis for Abelard's argument. And, as far as I can see, William could well change his semantics without being thereby committed to giving up his realist metaphysics. So, once again, I think Abelard

has failed to come up with a really good argument against the kind of realism we are dealing with in William's first theory, although he has scored points against other features of William's doctrine.

One last remark before I leave this second objection. The kind of definitional infinite regress Abelard has maneuvered William into has a technical name. It is called "nugation" (= *nugatio*) which means "speaking nonsense" or "babbling." In Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations* (which was only first appearing in translation in Abelard's own day, and did not yet have any influence), one way to refute your opponent was to reduce him to "babbling" — the Latin translation says '*nugatio*'. This doesn't mean that you are supposed to get your opponent so confused that he starts gurgling and frothing at the mouth (although you could probably "win" that way too). It means you can push him into one of these definitional infinite regresses. The flavor of the technical use of '*nugatio*' can perhaps be better captured by translating it 'stammering' — for example, "rational animal animal animal animal" (We have the word "nugatory," meaning "repetitious.")

(In *Five Texts*, I translate the word as "unnecessary repetition." It doesn't occur in the Abelard passage translated there. But see the Glossary, p. 233.)

Abelard's Third Objection (para. (38))

Abelard hurls another argument at his poor old teacher, and this one is easier to deal with. On your view, Abelard says, we ought to call an underlying material essence "many" — in the sense that a universal is said to be "many" (that is, "common to many") — because of the many different kinds of forms inhering in it. And in a sense that's right. What makes animal a universal, on this view, is the fact that not only does, say, rationality inhere in it, giving us rational animality or humanity, but also irrationality inheres in it, so that we also get irrational animal. Thus animality is "common to" or "shared by" both.

But if that's so, Abelard objects, then by the same token it seems we ought to call Socrates "many" — and so a universal — because he too has many different kinds of forms inhering in him — as he surely does on William's theory. Thus your view, Abelard might conclude, ends up destroying all difference between universals and individuals. (Note that this will be a big theme in many of Abelard's criticisms of earlier views: they blur — or even obliterate — the distinction between universals and individuals. And if course, if the charge is true, that would really be a serious objection.)

A Possible Reply William Might Have Made On His Own Behalf (But Once Again There Is Absolutely No Evidence That He Actually Did)

William might have defended himself by arguing that the two cases are not the same at all. The forms inhering in Socrates constitute him — that is, they result in Socrates. But the forms inhering in animality do not constitute animality, do not result in animality. They are added onto something already there; they “advene.” The individual is the material essence plus the advening forms. Thus the relation of the advening forms to the material essence is quite different from their relation to the individual they constitute. It is the difference between the relation of one addend to another addend, on the one hand, and the relation of either addend to their sum, on the other. (Note: This is the distinction Porphyry makes between what he calls a “constitutive difference” and a “divisive difference” — see Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, para. (46), and n. 11 on p. 8 of the translation in *Five Texts*.) This dissimilarity is enough to warrant our calling the material essence a universal without our being thereby forced to call the individual a universal too. As far as I can see, such a reply would be perfectly correct, and Abelard’s case is purely sophistical.

Abelard’s Fourth Objection (para. (39))

Here comes another one. This objection is directed against the notion of individuation by accidents. Abelard argues that this would make individuals dependent on their accidents, metaphysically “posterior” to them. But the opposite is true. Accidents are metaphysically “posterior” to and dependent on their individual substances. Accidents are ontologically parasitic.

As far as I know, Abelard seems to have been the first to raise this kind of objection against the theory of individuation by accidents. We discussed such a problem as early as Boethius’s theory of individuation by accidents in the *De trinitate*. But Boethius himself did not seem to worry about it, or even to be aware of it. And, as far as I know, neither did anyone else until the time of Abelard. And, as I said when we originally discussed this kind of objection, I think this is a serious objection. But:

William Might Reply (Although Again We Don’t Know That He Did)

William might defend himself. Accidents may depend on their individuals for you, Abelard, and even for Aristotle and Boethius (in some passages). But on my view, accidents are ontologically prior to the individual. They constitute it, not the other way around. You have distorted my theory, Abelard. You have taken the notion of accident and interpreted it in an Aristotelian way that is not part of my theory. (Note that William himself may in fact have talked in the Aristotelian way

Abelard's objection presupposes. But the point is: He didn't have to, and if he did he shouldn't have. Once again, the objection does not strike to the heart of this kind of realism, but only to an unfortunate terminology.)

Nevertheless, this fourth objection suggests a good argument against this form of realism — an argument that, oddly, Abelard never made. And it is an argument we saw earlier in connection with Boethius.

Aristotle's distinction of essence and accident, and his identification of the individual substance with its essence, so that the accidents depend on the individual substance and do not constitute it, all this was motivated at least in part by a desire to account for accidental change — that is, for cases in which we say that an individual changes color, say, but stays the same individual it was to begin with. The “pin-cushion” would stay the same, so to speak; the pins would come and go. (Recall the “Warp and Woof” handout.) Now we saw when we were discussing the antecedents of William's realist view in Boethius's *De trinitate* that the real problem with the theory there is that it rules out accidental change, freezes the individual. The change of a single accident would result in a whole new individual. This objection can be met as Leibniz did later on, by adding explicit time-specifications to the accidents (for instance, “red at time t ”). Nevertheless, that involves a rather major adjustment in the theory, and so the objection stands as a good objection to the theory as originally stated.

But Abelard conspicuously — and strangely, in my estimation — did not raise this objection.

Now let's pause and summarize what we've seen so far. Some of Abelard's objections to William's first theory may hold against a confused or badly expressed form of realism that William perhaps actually held. But they do not refute this form of realism in general — that is, the strong realism suggested by the “individuation by accidents” passage from Boethius's *De trinitate*.

Nevertheless, there is another argument that does “refute” the theory (the argument about accidental change), or at least requires one to change it in major ways. But Abelard did not raise that argument.

One wonders why William gave in to Abelard's arguments as easily as he did.

Nevertheless, he apparently did yield. As a result of Abelard's criticisms — at least to hear Abelard himself tell is — William abandoned his strong realism for a second theory. And this is the second position Abelard discusses in the passage we are examining. We turn to it now.

William of Champeaux's Second Theory (pp. 33–37, paras. (41)–(62) — including several variations held by various people)

On William's first theory, if you take Socrates and Plato and strip off all the advening forms until you get down to the level of humanity, you get only one humanity, not two. The humanity of Socrates and the humanity of Plato are one humanity.

On the second theory (as stated in paras. (41)–(44)), this changes. You end up with two humanities, not one. The humanity of Socrates is not identical with the humanity of Plato. Each has his own. And if you ask what makes them distinct, the answer is "They just come that way." There is nothing — no advening form — that narrows humanity in general down to yield Socrates, since there is no such thing as humanity in general on this theory. And there is nothing — no advening form — that you add to Socrates's humanity or to Plato's humanity in order to make Socrates distinct from Plato. There are advening forms, perhaps (p. 31, para. (41), says there are). But whether there are or not, in any case they don't play this role. They do not individuate or differentiate. Everything on this theory is individual to begin with, and already distinct from everything else at the outset.

Now you might think this is an undesirable feature of William's second theory. It leaves the distinctness of things a purely brute fact; there is no explanation whatever for their being distinct. But notice: even on William's first theory, the ten Aristotelian categories are distinct from one another in this way (see p. 34, para. (43)). There is no one super-genus that is divided up by advening forms into the ten categories. The categories just are distinct all by themselves. They just come that way.

In fact, it seems to me that almost any ontological theory — whether realist or nominalist — is going to have to say that some things are distinct from one another without there being anything else that distinguishes them. They are distinct because "they just come that way." The basic and most fundamental elements of your ontology will have to be like this, or else they will not be really "basic."

There are only two ways to avoid this consequence, it seems to me: (1) Adopt a thoroughgoing Parmenidean monism, so that there is only one thing in your ontology from beginning to end, and the question of that one thing's distinction from other things simply doesn't arise. Or (2) you could, I suppose, adopt an ontology that has no basic and fundamental elements at all (no ontological "categories"), but rather accepts some kind of infinite analysis, an infinite regress in which everything in your ontology is built up on the basis of more fundamental

factors, without there being any ultimate starting point. Neither of these alternatives seems especially attractive, at least not to me.

In short, even before we get into the details of William's second theory, we can see that it is not automatically an objection to it to point out that it says things are distinct without there being anything else that distinguishes them. Most theories — and all “serious” theories — have to say that at some point or other. If we are going to argue against the theory, we are going to have to find some other point of attack than this.

First, some terminology. On this new theory, we can no longer say that Socrates's humanity and Plato's humanity are “essentially the same” — i.e., with respect to their “material essence” — as Abelard describes the terminology of William's earlier theory (at p. 29, para. (23): “they set up essentially the same substance in things diverse from one another through forms”). Rather, the second theory says, they “are the same not essentially but indifferently” (p. 34, para. (44): “they call things that are discrete ‘the same’, not essentially but indifferently”).

The point of this terminological nuance is that here we are replacing a positive term by a negative one. The first view said positively, “They are the same,” where this is taken to mean that something is positively shared. The second view says negatively, “They are not different.” They do not differ “in man” or “in humanity,” or “in” anything else. (Note this locution. We'll come back to it in just a moment.)

Now, Abelard goes on, this lack of difference is to be spelled out in terms of similarity or likeness. The humanity of Socrates and the humanity of Plato are not identical, but they are alike (p. 34, para. (44)):

The same things they call singular according to their discreteness they call universal according to their “indifference” and the agreement of likeness.

In addition to the discussion in his *Glosses on Porphyry* (which we are now discussing), Abelard also sketches this second view very briefly in his *Adversities*, p. 17, where basically all he does is repeat the phrase “not essentially but indifferently.”

Here are some things to note about this second theory:

(1) While William's first theory goes back to an interpretation of Boethius's remarks in the *De trinitate* about individuation by accidents — near the beginning

of passage (2) from the *Theological Tractates* in the *Notes and Texts* — this second theory goes back to the nominalist view found, in various forms, in Boethius's *Second Commentary on Porphyry*, the *Contra Eutychen*, and also other passages in the *De trinitate* (about “forms” vs. “images”). One way of cashing out this view, we've seen, was the well-worked “seal ring” analogy, where the ring was the divine idea. Abelard doesn't develop the view in quite this way here, any more than Boethius did in his *Commentary on Porphyry* (there's no mention of a “seal-ring” either place). Also, “matter” seemed to be a principle of individuation in the *Contra Eutychen* and in one passage from the *De trinitate*, although nothing is said about it in the *Commentary on Porphyry*, any more than there is here in Abelard. What William himself actually thought about these points is anyone's guess.

(2) The key term ‘indifferently’ (para. (44)) is a term we've seen before. It comes from Boethius's *De trinitate* (p. 51, line 71 in the passage from the *Notes and Texts*, where I've flagged it in n. 7). There Boethius uses the term ‘indifference’ (= “lack of difference” in the translation) for the basis of the unity of the Trinity. The three persons are not identical, but they are indifferent — that is, there is no difference between them, neither a specific difference in Porphyry's sense nor an “individual difference” or principle of individuation (in the sense of “principle of differentiation,” as we described it earlier). The recurrence of the term ‘indifference’ is not coincidental. This is surely a conscious allusion back to Boethius.

(3) Unlike William's of Champeaux's first theory, we do possess a text in which he apparently actually does maintain this second view. Most of William's writings are totally lost. But we do have this little piece. It is translated by Muckle in *Adversities*, p. 17 n. 12. Here's what it says:

That we may exclude all ambiguity, you see that the two words one and same can be taken in two ways, according to indifference and according to identity of the same essence. [Those are just William's second and first theory, respectively.] According to indifference, as we say Peter and Paul are the same in this that they are men, for so far as pertains to their humanity, just as the former is rational, so also is the latter; and just as he is mortal, so also is the other. But if we would acknowledge the truth, there is not the same humanity in both since they are two men.

The passage is perhaps not entirely explicit, but there it is. (As far as I can see, there is no basis in this text for any suggestion of yet a third position, as Muckle says some people have thought.)

(4) William was not the only twelfth century author to hold a view like this, any more than he was the only one to hold a view like his first theory. We also find this second theory, or a reasonable facsimile of it, maintained by the famous Gilbert of Poitiers (also called Gilbert de la Porrée). Gilbert, like Clarembald of Arras, who — you’ll recall — maintained a view like William’s first theory, belonged to the School of Chartres. Bernard of Chartres seems to have been another one to hold a view like William’s second one. (See the handout I distributed earlier on “Relations of Influence in the Twelfth Century,” for a little chart showing you where Bernard — and the others — fit into the overall chronology of this period. See the HANDOUT “THE SCHOOL OF CHARTRES,” on the doctrine.) There are some texts from Gilbert in the *Notes and Texts*, pp. 69–70 (in the section “Passages from the School of Chartres”). They are pretty obscure, but you should be able to see the point of them. (The handout will perhaps help.) Also on Gilbert, see John of Salisbury’s remarks in Hyman and Walsh, p. 169 (), and the fairly extensive discussion in Jorge Gracia’s book.

Abelard’s Reply to William’s Second Theory

Basically, Abelard thinks this second theory of William’s is perfectly all right, as far as the metaphysics goes. With certain adjustments, he will accept it himself (although he doesn’t think it is the whole story). On the other hand, he does not think it is a realism, as its proponents maintain. “Yet,” he says (p. 34, para. (44)), “they still retain a universal in things.” That is, “they” think not only that words are “universals” in the sense of being predicable of many (everyone agreed on that), but also things could be predicable of many. Thus Abelard’s attack on this second view is not that it is metaphysically incoherent — although he does disagree with William’s way of expressing it. Rather, his main question for this theory is “What is the thing that is supposed to be universal on this theory?”

Recall the definition of a universal at the beginning of the passage we are now considering from the *Glosses on Porphyry*, the definition from Aristotle. According to that definition, a universal is what is “predicated of many.” So, what thing on this second theory is predicated of many? Surely not Socrates’s humanity, since that is predicated only of Socrates. And not Plato’s humanity, since that is predicated only of Plato. And, on this theory, there simply is no common humanity to be predicated at all.

Note: Although Abelard initially posed the problem of universals at the beginning of our section from his *Glosses on Porphyry* (p. 28, paragraph (16)) in terms of the Aristotelian predicational notion of a universal, a lot of what he says about William’s second theory will seem to blur the distinction between that notion and the more “Boethian” metaphysical notion in terms of being shared “as a whole,

simultaneously,” etc. In short, for a thing to be “predicated of many,” on this theory, seems in effect to be a matter of those things’ being “had by” or “inhering in” what they are predicated of. I can’t prove it, but I suspect this is probably a fair reading of William’s second theory; for the most part, although there were these two distinct notions of a universal, most people thought that in the end they amounted to the same thing. That is, what would count as a universal thing in the one sense was also universal in the other. (Universal terms of course would not count as Boethian universals.) Abelard’s own theory will break this equivalence, at least as I read him. But he’s not talking for now about his own theory; he’s talking about William’s.

Abelard considers two variations of this theory, in addition to William’s own, variations that try to answer just this question, and so to save the realism of the theory. Just why people should be so concerned to insist that it is a realist theory is not very clear. Perhaps Anselm’s accusations against Roscelin had something to do with it. Or perhaps it was simply that people hadn’t really thought very explicitly about the questions Abelard was asking. In any case, let’s look at the first such variation:

Joscelin of Soissons’ View (pp. 34–36, paras. (45)–(55))

(This is a good potential paper topic. There are texts available in English in King’s dissertation, and a moderate amount of philosophically-oriented secondary literature readily available, including the sample graduate paper I’ve put online from an earlier version of this course.)

On this variation, the universal humanity is the collection (*collectio*) of all the individual humanities, the humanity of Socrates and the humanity of Plato and so on. All of them taken together constitute the species man, which is then predicated of them all. John of Salisbury (p. 169) is the one who tells us that this view was held by a certain Joscelin (= Goselinus), Bishop of Soissons, and by someone else. “There is another,” he says, “who with Joscelin” Peter King, in his dissertation, presents us with the Latin edition and an English translation of a text *On Genera and Species* that in fact maintains this “*collectio*”-theory. Victor Cousin, in 1836, published an edition of this text. King’s edition is better than Cousin’s, since we have subsequently found additional manuscripts on the basis of which to reconstruct it.

Cousin attributed this text to Abelard himself, but that appears to be definitely wrong; Abelard’s theory is not like this at all. (Of course, when Cousin was writing Abelard’s works had never been printed and no one had much of an idea what he held.) On the other hand, Carl Prantl, the rather opinionated historian of

logic, in his *Geschichte der Logik im Abendlande* (1861), attributed the work to Joscelyn on the basis of the fact that the doctrine in it conforms to what John of Salisbury says about Joscelyn. Prantl's attribution has been repeated many times, and seems to have been until recently the prevailing view about the authorship of this work.

On the other hand, Peter King in his dissertation points out that the work seems to refer to Joscelyn of Soissons in the third person, which suggests that it is not by him but by someone else. So Peter calls the author, appropriately, a "Pseudo-Joscelyn," who may or may not be the "someone else" John of Salisbury referred to. In any event, the work maintains a version of the "*collectio*"-theory referred to by John of Salisbury, and you can look at it in King's dissertation for details. (King also discusses Pseudo-Joscelyn's doctrine in some detail in Vol. 1 of his dissertation, Ch. 8. Note that, whoever he is, this Pseudo-Joscelyn is the same "Pseudo-Joscelyn" I mentioned a little while back in connection with "Material Essence Realism" — William's first theory. I said, recall, that Peter King cites some other texts that give us evidence about how "Material Essence Realism" worked in the twelfth century. This is the same man, and in fact it's the same text. So, while Pseudo-Joscelyn gives us some evidence on how to interpret "Material Essence Realism," his own theory is the "*collectio*"-theory.)

Note that by 'collection', Joscelyn almost certainly did not mean a "set" in the sense of modern set-theory. Set-theory is funny stuff, and really wasn't invented until Cantor in the nineteenth century. If what Joscelyn had in mind were sets in the modern sense, then we would have to start asking about the "null collection" and the "power collection," and so on. And there is no trace of that kind of talk, or anything equivalent to it, in the Middle Ages — or of that kind of notion.

What I suspect is much closer to what Joscelyn had in mind is the modern notion of a "mereological whole." The term 'mereology' comes from Greek μέρος, meaning 'part', and mereology is in effect the theory of wholes and parts. It was developed to begin with by the Polish logician Leśniewski in the 1920's and '30's, and more recently by Nelson Goodman in his *The Structure of Appearance* and David Lewis in his *Parts of Classes*. But it's not a purely modern development. A "mereological whole" is in effect what the Middle Ages called an "integral whole," discussed to some extent in Boethius's *De divisione*, which is available in a recent English translation. This is an important work I'm not as familiar with as I should be.

The difference between a set and a mereological whole can be illustrated briefly like this: The state of Michigan is the mereological whole consisting of the Upper Peninsula and the Lower Peninsula as parts. That is, it is a certain land mass consisting of those parts. But the state of Michigan, the same land-mass, is also

the mereological whole consisting of all the counties in the state. That is, if you add up the Upper and the Lower Peninsulas, you get a certain geographical area. If you add up all the counties, you get the same geographical area. On the other hand, if you take the set of the Upper and Lower Peninsula and then take the set of all the counties in Michigan, you don't end up with the same set; you end up with two distinct sets instead. The former has only two members, the latter many more than that (however many counties there are in Michigan).

Well, I don't want to go into the details of mereology here. I just want to warn you not to think of pre-nineteenth century talk about "collections" or "wholes" as though it were automatically about sets. It almost certainly is not.

So when Joscelin speaks of the "collection" of all human beings as being the species man, he's not talking about the set of all human beings. He's probably thinking of something more like what we would call the human race.

On the whole, Abelard has no trouble with this "collectio"-theory. Here are his objections (there are six of them):

(1) (p. 35, para. (48)) A collection is predicated only by parts. The collection of all men is not wholly present to each man in such a way that the whole collection enters into the very structure of each individual. But Boethius says that a real universal is not predicated by parts, but only as a whole. Actually, if you go back and check Boethius, you will see that he doesn't put in terms of predication at all. Abelard's adjustment of Boethius here will be significant. Still, Abelard has a good point. Collections don't seem to behave the way universals are supposed to do. (Note how this objection seems to collapse the distinction between the "predicational" sense and the "Boethian" sense of a universal.)

(2) (p. 35, para. (49)) Furthermore, if you insist that there is a sense in which the whole collection is "predicated" of each of its parts (perhaps by taking predication as in effect just the converse of the relation of being a part of the collection), then whatever that sense is, it seems that Socrates may also be predicated in the same way of each of his parts, so that Socrates would be a universal too. In other words, if the relation between a universal and its individuals is just the whole-part relation, then how does it differ from, say, the relation between Socrates and his parts — his hand and his ear, for instance? If there is no relevant difference, then if the former relation makes humanity a universal, so too it ought to make Socrates a universal. (Compare p. 33, para. (38), Abelard's third objection against William's first theory.)

This collectio-theory, then, radically alters the dividing line between universals and individuals. The only true individuals, on this view, would have no parts at all; they would be metaphysical atoms. Whether there are such things or not, they

are certainly not the things we normally call “individuals.” This view thus ends up betraying the common-sense starting point with which it began.

The force of this objection seems to rest on taking the collection as what was called an “integral whole” (nowadays a “mereological” whole) — that is, a whole made up of parts in the way a house, say, is made up of the roof and the walls and the floor, etc. — so that the relation between the universal “collection” and one of its parts is just like the relation between Socrates and one of his physical parts. It is not clear whether this distorts the *collectio*-theory or not. We simply do not know. In any case, if this is not the relation between a universal and its individuals, then Joscelyn owes us a further explanation of just what that relation is.

(3) (p. 35, para. (50)) Man would not be a lowest species (*infima species*, *species specialissima*), as it is on the standard doctrine — that is, a species containing only individuals under it, no subordinate species. For there are various subcollections of men — by gender or nationality, for instance — and these subcollections would be universal (if universals are just collections), so that we would have subspecies after all.

Joscelyn could, I suppose, have replied that his doctrine is not a “standard” one, so that there is no reason to think he ought to be committed to the statement that man is a lowest species. Still, he would probably have felt the force of this objection. There is no reason to think Joscelyn was trying to especially novel or innovative here. He would probably have regarded it as a defect of his theory if it really does imply that man is not an *infima species*. Everyone, realists and nominalists alike, accepted that.

(4) (pp. 35–36, paras. (51)–(53)) The fourth objection is one I’m not really confident I understand very well, and there may in fact be some textual problems at this point. Note that in para. (51) on p. 35 I’ve had to supply some words of my own (in square brackets) in order to get anything that could be construed as an argument. Let’s look at what it says: “Likewise,” he begins, “we would end up calling any collection whatever of bodies and spirits one universal ‘substance’.”

What does that mean? Well, notice first that the phrase ‘bodies and spirits’ is just equivalent to saying ‘material and immaterial substances’. But why would “any collection” of such things count as “one universal ‘substance’”?

Well, this might mean that if universals are just “collections,” then any old collection is going to give you a universal, and so any old collection made up of substances is going to give you a universal in the *category* substance. But I suspect instead that there are some words left out here, and that what Abelard means is that any old collection of material and immaterial substances that

includes *all* of them at a given time will count as **the** one universal category “substance.” (That’s why I put the word ‘substance’ in quotation marks in the translation, to try to signal that we’re not just talking about a universal in that category, but about that very category itself.)

But whether that’s what he meant in this part of the paragraph or not doesn’t make a lot of difference, since the rest of the paragraph seems to be the more important part, and there he does seem to be thinking along these lines. “...since the whole collection of substances is one most general genus,” he says, “it would follow that when any one substance is taken away when the rest remain...” — and then I have to add some stuff of my own.

What he means here can, I think, be put like this: Let’s suppose the collection of all substances at a given moment constitutes the category substance, as this theory seems to say—that is, the “most general genus” substance. All right, now suppose that one of those substances is destroyed (“taken away,” as he puts it) while the others remain. The collection of remaining substances is a different and smaller collection from the one we had before. And yet this collection is now the collection of all substances, by hypothesis, and so is now the category substance.

The objection then seems to be that if the universal substance is just the collection of all substances at any given time, then it keeps changing its identity as old substances are destroyed and new ones are generated.

What’s wrong with that? Well, Abelard doesn’t say. But it’s not hard to supply a reason. The universal category substance is supposed to be an important and essential component of my metaphysical make-up. So if that category is continually changing its identity over time, then my essence is continually changing over time too.

So I am continually changing not only accidentally but even essentially without my doing anything at all, which seems wrong.

Modern people might be tempted to reply that this objection can be easily met by simply taking the category substance as not just the collection of all presently existing substances, but the collection of all past, present and future (and perhaps even the merely possible) substances. That collection surely does not keep changing over time. But this is not a move that would be likely to occur to a medieval author, and would surely not have been very attractive even if it had. For it ends up making the category substance — this very important universal that is supposed to enter into my innermost metaphysical make-up — be such that most of it doesn’t even exist!

In any event, Abelard doesn’t consider that possible reply. But he does suggest what appears to be an attempt to avoid this result in para. (52) on p. 35: “But

perhaps it will be said in reply that no collection included in a most general genus is itself a most general genus.”

That’s not very clear, I’m afraid. It’s possible to interpret it in the way I just mentioned, as saying that the category substance is the collection of all past, present and future substances — although, as I say, I don’t think that’s very likely.

In any case, whatever the reasoning here, the overall strategy of this reply is fairly plain. It proceeds by denying that any of the other “smaller” collections that result when a substance is destroyed will count as the category substance. (Presumably the “larger” collection that would result if a new substance is generated would also not count as the category. But that side of things simply isn’t mentioned at all here.)

So, since these other collections don’t count as the category, for whatever reason, the category doesn’t keep changing its identity over time after all.

We don’t really have to know the reasoning here, because Abelard has a counterreply to this strategy in any case. Look at pp. 35–36, para. (53). Suppose the reply in para. (52) is correct, he says. That is, no subcollection under the category substance can count as that category, no matter what substances come and go. Now suppose a single substance is destroyed. Well, he says, we will want to say that the category substance continues to exist anyway. He doesn’t say why, but it’s not hard to supply the reason. Categories are the most general genera, recall. But, as Porphyry says in the *Isagoge* (para. (64)), where he’s talking about the similarities between genus and difference, “when either the genus or the difference is destroyed, the things under it are destroyed too. For just as if there is no animal there is no horse or man, so too if rational does not exist there will be no animal possessed of reason.” In short, if the category substance ceased to exist when one substance were destroyed, no other substance could continue to exist either. To destroy one substance would be to destroy them all.

OK. So we start off with all the substances there are, and then we destroy one of them. The category substance is somehow still there, as we’ve just seen, and so is the collection of all the remaining substances. Now if universals are just collections, then this collection of remaining substances is a universal of some kind or other. It’s not the category substance, by hypothesis. And certainly it’s not a universal in some other category, although Abelard doesn’t bother to make that obvious point explicitly. Therefore, the collection of remaining substances must be a species in the category substance.

So far, so good. But, Abelard goes on, if the collection of remaining substances is a species in the category substance, then it “has to have a coequal species under

the same genus.” (To say two species are coequal is not to say they have the same number of individuals in them. It’s just to say they both occur at the same level of division and, so to speak, off of the same node of the Porphyrian tree.)

Abelard’s point, then, is that a genus cannot be divided into a single species, because that wouldn’t really be a division.

Now at first this sounds like the similar claim we’ve already seen Odo of Tournai make (Odo, pp. 61–62, line 30–32). Recall that Odo had said that while it is possible to have a species with only one individual in it (like the phoenix), you cannot have a genus with only one species in it. When we talked about Odo earlier, I said this didn’t seem to be right. What is there to prevent it from happening, for instance, that all animals are annihilated by some catastrophe or other — except for beetles? So even though “conceptually” you can’t have a genus that doesn’t have at least two species in it, nevertheless in actual fact one of those species might not be “actualized.” (Beetles turn out not to be a good example, since they come in several different species. But never mind.)

Well, at first it sounds as if Abelard is making the same point. And perhaps he is, in which case either I just don’t understand his point or else Abelard is, at least here, as much of a lightweight as poor old Odo was. But I think the point is perhaps not really the same. In the present case, according to the story Abelard is telling, we start off with “the whole collection of substances,” as he puts it (para. (51)), and then destroy not a species, as Odo had it, but only one single substance — that is, an individual. So we cannot say, as we could in the case of the beetles, that the species coequal to the species that remains has been destroyed. It hasn’t. Only one individual has been destroyed, and an individual is not a species. (In fact, one of Abelard’s recurring criticisms in many of these arguments against these preliminary views is that they end up destroying, or at least blurring, the distinction between individuals and universals. This may be part of the point of Abelard’s second objection against William of Champeaux’s first theory [para. (37)]. But it’s certainly the point of his third objection [(38)]. And it will be his main objection to Walter of Mortagne’s theory, as we will see [Walter’s theory is stated in (47) and argued against in (56)–(58).])

So we’re left with the conclusion that in addition to the collection of all remaining substances, which is a species of substance, there is also another, correlative species of substance still in existence—we haven’t destroyed a species, remember, but only an individual. (I’m not sure it really follows that we have a coequal species. But let’s just see what happens.) In that case, as Abelard quite properly asks, “But what coequal species can there be opposite to it?”—i.e., opposite to the species consisting of all the remaining substances. That coequal species would have to be some kind of collection of the remaining substances.

And there are only two possibilities. Either it is the whole collection of the remaining substances, in which case it isn't really a new species, coequal to the collection of all remaining substances. It just is that species all over again. I take it this is what Abelard means when he says (p. 36 top) it would be "straightforwardly contained" in that species. By 'straightforwardly contained' he must here mean "exactly contained." Otherwise, I don't see how the argument will work.

OK, that's one alternative. The only other alternative is that the coequal species be some sub-collection of the collection of all remaining substances. As Abelard says (p. 36, para. (53)), it would "share some individuals with it." But in that case, the two species aren't coequal; the second is subordinated to, is a subspecies of, the first.

Well, that's the best I can do with this argument. If I've got it right, then Abelard may indeed have a case, although it would take a lot more work to see whether this is really a good line of argument or not.

(5) Abelard has still two more objections against the "collectio"-theory. At p. 36, para. (54), we get a fifth one. On the realist view, he says, individuals are composed of universals. (Recall the "layer-cake" picture.) Universals are the constituents of individuals, so that the individual is ontologically posterior. But Joscelyn's view makes universals (i.e., collections) out to be composed of individuals, so that the universal is ontologically posterior to the individual, as a whole is posterior to (= dependent on) its part.

It seems to me that Joscelyn could reply by saying that the ontological posteriority of individuals to universals is a feature of certain realist views, but not of his own. But I suspect Joscelyn would have been unwilling to reverse the customary priorities in this way. As with objection (3), Joscelyn would probably have found this result an embarrassment. His "collectio"-talk was presumably meant to be a defense of a longstanding, traditional theory, not a reversal of it.

(6) The sixth and (mercifully) last argument is in para. (55). According to Boethius's *De divisione* (= *On Division* — I've mentioned this book before, although I don't know it well), the species is the same — that is, identically the same — as the genus. But on Joscelyn's theory they can't be, since the collection of all men is not the same as the collection of all animals.

This argument may puzzle you. How on earth can Boethius say in his *De divisione* that a species is identical with its genus? Well, he does say it (the reference is in para. (55)), and in fact he is being quite Aristotelian in saying it. (And now we're going to get something we haven't really seen so far.)

According to at least one way of reading Aristotle — the way Boethius is peddling in the *De divisione* — Socrates contains his own individual humanity, which is distinct from and similar to Plato's own individual humanity. (That much, of course, is already familiar to us from the seal-ring picture.) Socrates also contains his own individual animality, and — this is the important point — it is the same thing as his individual humanity.

Put it another way, in terms of our “plucked chicken” experiment. Start with Socrates and Plato, and pull off their accidents and any other metaphysical debris until you get down to the level of humanity. How many humanities do you end up with? Two, on this theory. Now put it all back and start over. This time, pull off all the accidents and other stuff until you get down to the level of animality. How many animalities do you end up with? Two — and furthermore, you end up exactly where you did the first time around.

Remember my “Warp and Woof” paper, where I talked about a basically Platonic-style metaphysics and a basically Aristotelian-style metaphysics. On a Platonic-style metaphysics (which is not what we have here), the facts of predication are a good guide to the metaphysical way things are. And so, since ‘human’ and ‘animal’ are different predicates, and since they are not true of exactly the same things, they must correspond to distinct metaphysical components out there. And this is true no matter whether we are being realist or nominalist about universals, no matter whether we’re thinking in terms of metaphysical layer-cakes or seal-rings.

Plainly, that is not the framework that is behind this sixth objection. On this framework, even though some things are animals that are not human beings, nevertheless within a human being, humanity and animality are the same thing.

How does this work? Well, by having his own humanity Socrates has his own rational animality. That’s what humanity is, after all: rational animality. His humanity therefore is a kind of animality — no more, no less. In other words, on this picture we are not to think of humanity as somehow rationality PLUS animality (as something distinct from the rationality).

The point is this: On this new picture, we don’t want to think of Socrates’s animality as something to which rationality is added as a separate ingredient. His animality not some neutral entity that’s neither rational nor irrational, such that its rationality would have to be added on as an extra. That would mean Socrates’s animality (as distinct from his rationality) would violate the Law of Excluded Middle by being neither rational nor not. (Remember, I sketched an argument for you along these lines at the very beginning of this course. There I cast it in the form of an argument against realism. But the same considerations can be used for other purposes too.) If you feel unsure of yourselves in this kind of metaphysics,

hold on a bit, because we'll see it again in the next theory Abelard considers and rejects.

But for the present, let's finish up Abelard's treatment of the "collectio"-theory, as in Pseudo-Joscelin of Soissons. This last objection by Abelard in effect observes that if universals are just collections, then since the collection of all human beings is not the same as the collection of all animals (the latter is much larger), there's no way the "collection"-theory can do justice to the Aristotelian-Boethian view (in Boethius's *De divisione*) that the species is metaphysically identical with the genus. And, as far as it goes, this seems to me perfectly correct.

Note that Abelard, by raising this objection, is in effect rejecting the opposing theory, the theory of "plurality of forms." (This theory was discussed in the "Warp and Woof" paper.) According to that theory, Socrates's humanity is one thing, and his animality is something else again. So too, his being alive, his corporeality and his substantiality. They are all distinct forms. This theory of the "plurality of forms" and the opposing theory, which Abelard (following Aristotle and Boethius) accepts, fought it out at length in the following century. Aquinas, for example, sided with Aristotle and Abelard. There were a number of factors at stake in this dispute, but we need not go into them now. For now it suffices to say merely that these two theories represent fundamentally different metaphysical approaches, as described in the "Warp and Woof" paper.

Now it seems to me that Joscelin of Soissons could easily defend himself against this last objection. He could simply reject the Aristotelian identification of species with genus. There was certainly ample precedent for doing so — the whole other way of doing metaphysics.

Let's summarize then Abelard's case against the "collectio"-theory. In my estimation, Abelard's most successful objections are the first two, and to a lesser extent the third and fifth. **(1, 2)** The first two objections amount to saying that a "collection" is simply not the sort of thing that can play the role of a universal, or — if it is — then (objection 2) individuals (or at least individuals with parts to them) will turn out to be universals too, so that the theory wrecks the distinction between universals and individuals. **(3, 5)** The third and fifth objections could perhaps be answered if Joscelin were willing to break radically with traditional views and ways of talking. But it is more likely that he viewed himself as defending a certain traditional theory, not rejecting it. **(4)** The fourth objection may work, insofar as I understand it. But I'm not confident enough of it return a definite verdict. **(6)** The sixth objection seems to me an unfair attempt to judge Joscelin's theory by standards he had no need to accept.

Walter of Mortagne's Theory (*stated in para. (47)*)

The last objection against Joscelin leads naturally to the second variation on William's second view, which Abelard now turns to.

Recall that the question Abelard is asking throughout his critique of William's second theory and its variants is this: "What thing on this theory is universal, what thing is predicated of many?" On this new variant, Socrates the individual is simultaneously an individual, a species and a genus. He is an individual insofar as he is Socrates, a species insofar as he is a man, and a genus insofar as he is an animal. (And so on up the Porphyrian tree. In the end, we can say Socrates is a category insofar as he is a substance.)

This theory is based on the kind of consideration we have just seen in the sixth objection to Joscelin's view—the consideration that identified genus with species in Socrates. In that earlier discussion, we didn't hear anything about identifying Socrates himself with that genus or species, which is what Walter of Mortagne's theory does. But the underlying rationale is the same. What makes Socrates Socrates, what makes him a man and what makes him an animal are all the same thing. It is his own animality, which is not an irrational but a rational animality — that is, a humanity — and is not a Plato-style humanity — with brown eyes, say — but a Socrates-style humanity — with blue eyes. In Socrates, it is all the same thing. The different degrees of generality in our predication are just a result of our considering Socrates insofar as he is Socrates, insofar as he is a man, or insofar as he is an animal. That is, it all depends on how broad or narrow our focus is. But it is the same thing we are talking about in each case.

John of Salisbury (p. 168) tells us that a view like this one was held by a certain Walter of Mortagne. (Like Pseudo-Joscelin of Soissons, we mentioned Walter earlier, in connection with other texts Peter King gives us that provide us with evidence for how "Material Essence Realism" was taken in the twelfth century.) Later on, John of Salisbury continues, Walter adopted a version of the Platonic Theory of Ideas, and held that the divine ideas were the true genera and species of things. Bernard of Chartres had already said the same thing about the divine ideas. See the handout on "The School of Chartres."

Note that Walter's adoption of Platonism need not have involved any real change of mind on his part about the overall metaphysical picture. The nominalist, sealing picture is quite compatible with the kind of Platonism John of Salisbury is talking about. The question is merely one of what we want to identify as the genera and species of things: the impressions in matter (Boethius's "images") or

the Divine Ideas that serve as their patterns and paradigms? The metaphysical picture can be the same on both alternatives.

Peter King, in his dissertation, discusses Walter of Mortagne, and translates a text from Walter in Volume 2 of his dissertation.

In any case, Abelard attacks this second variation too, in paras. (56)–(59). If you look at the text and take words like ‘Also’ and ‘Furthermore’ at the beginning of paras. (57)–(58) as signaling the beginnings of new arguments, then Abelard has four arguments against Walter’s theory. (And that’s the way I’ve outlined it in the *Notes and Texts*.) But in fact, it’s probably easier to treat them as really three arguments, or even two (paras. (56)–(58), and then para. (59)).

Now before we even look at the arguments, you may well ask: If Walter of Mortagne’s theory is based on the same kinds of considerations as those Abelard himself appealed to in his sixth objection to Joscelin of Soissons — that is, if Walter’s theory is based on considerations with which Abelard agrees — then why on earth is Abelard arguing against it here? But be careful: He’s not arguing against the theory. He’s only arguing that it is not a realism, as it apparently claimed to be. Here are his arguments (I’ll condense them to two, as I just suggested):

(1) (paras. (56)–(58)) The basic idea here is that on this theory, universals and individuals behave exactly the same way — which is not surprising, since on this theory the individual Socrates just is a universal species or genus if he is considered in a certain way.

On this theory, Abelard says, humanity insofar as it is narrowed down to Socrates can no more be predicated of many than can Socrates himself, insofar as he is Socrates. (That much sounds like a valid point.) Conversely, Socrates, insofar as he is a man can be predicated of many just as much as humanity can, insofar as it is just humanity. (Well, maybe, depending on how the theory actually goes.) Hence, Abelard concludes, individuals and universals are predicable of exactly the same things in exactly the same senses. And that certainly doesn’t sound right. In fact, it means that this theory destroys the distinction between individuals and universals. If Socrates is an individual, a species and a genus, then an individual is a universal, and vice versa. (At least they are if this theory is a form of realism, as Walter apparently claimed.) Here again we see Abelard’s device of accusing other people’s theories of wrecking the distinction between individuals and universals.

(2) (para. 59) Furthermore, Walter wants to say that, in some sense, Socrates and Plato agree (= convenire, literally “come together”) in humanity, or in man. That after all is why ‘man’ can be truly predicated of both. But what is this

humanity in which they agree? Which humanity is it? Not Socrates's humanity, surely, because they don't agree or come together in that — the one has it and the other one doesn't. Neither can it be Plato's humanity, for the same reason. And neither can it be anyone else's humanity, for yet the same reason. And there is no general humanity in which they can agree or come together, according to this theory. Hence, there is no humanity at all in which Socrates and Plato can "agree."

It seems to me that these arguments are good ones. They show, not that Walter of Mortagne's theory is wrong, but that it is not a realism. In effect, Abelard is not criticizing the theory so much as he is rejecting one of the claims made about it. On this theory, there is simply nothing in the ontology, no extra-linguistic thing, that is predicated of many.

Refutation of William of Champeaux's Own Theory (paras. (60)–(62))

After refuting these two variants of William of Champeaux's second theory (or at least refuting the claim that they are realisms), Abelard turns to face William's view itself. Presumably we're now not considering various defenders of William's second theory, or various followers of it, but rather the way William actually put it himself. (Of course, since we have so little of William's actual writings, it's pretty hard to be sure of this.)

William wanted to say that Socrates and Plato agree in man, or agree in humanity. So did Walter of Mortagne, to judge by Abelard's criticism in para. (59). But whereas Walter perhaps wanted to take these expressions positively, William takes them negatively; recall his term 'indifferently' in para. (44): "they call things that are discrete 'the same,' not essentially but indifferently." Socrates and Plato then agree in man in the sense that they do not differ in man, or in humanity. The point is that we're not basing this theory on a claim about what is out there, but on a claim about what isn't out there; there isn't anything to distinguish Socrates and Plato in this respect — that is, in being men.

But, Abelard objects (para. (61)), neither do they differ in rock, and yet we don't say they agree in rock, in such a way that the term 'rock' could be truly predicated of both of them. In effect, then, William has not given us any account of why we call both Socrates and Plato "men," and yet we do not call them "rocks." It's true that nothing distinguishes them as being men, but then nothing distinguishes them as being rocks either. What we don't yet have is an account of why despite their being nothing out there that does this, we nevertheless do call

them both “men” and don’t call them both “rocks.” And that point seems to me to be correct—at least as far as we’ve seen so far.

A Possible Reply (para. (61), lines 3–5 — from “unless perhaps”)

Abelard doesn’t really fill in the details of any reply. But he does say that perhaps you might want to add some premise (the Latin is ‘*propositio*’, which often, as here, does not mean “proposition” but “premise”) that allows the man case but not the rock case. That is, we want some premise to the effect that if persons A and B do not differ in man, then they agree in man in the sense that the term ‘man’ can be truly predicated of both of them. But we don’t want it to work where you substitute certain other terms — like ‘rock’ — for ‘man’. It doesn’t really make any difference how you would argue for this special premise, since Abelard doesn’t think it will help anyway. Here is why:

Refutation of This Reply (para. (62))

Abelard counters that it is not even true that Socrates and Plato do not differ in man. Hence, it could hardly be appealed to explain anything. As I understand it, his analysis goes like this (and now things get a little formal):

Since we are not talking about a universal man in the sense of William of Champeaux’s first theory, we must gloss the statement ‘Socrates and Plato do not differ in man’ as follows: Socrates and Plato do not differ in a man — that is, in any (individual) man at all. The lack of an indefinite article in Latin allows this step to be made without calling for any special comment.

All right, but now what does this new sentence mean? Well, in general, how do we analyze a sentence of the form ‘A and B do not differ in a C’?

Suppose we say that two things, A and B, do differ with respect to (“in”) a color — that is, with respect to some color. Then we can parse this as: Either A has some color that B doesn’t have, or B has some color that A doesn’t have. (Perhaps one is colorless.) So too, therefore, to say that A and B do not differ in a color is to say the denial of this: A has no color that B doesn’t have too, and likewise B has no color that A doesn’t have too.

OK. Now similarly, to say that Socrates and Plato do not differ in a man, or in a humanity, is to say that Socrates has no humanity that Plato doesn’t have too and Plato has no humanity that Socrates doesn’t have too. But on William’s second theory, that is just plain false! Each of Socrates and Plato has his own humanity, which the other one does not have. Thus, far from saying that Socrates and Plato do not differ in a man, William should have said that they do. The claim that they do not encapsulates William’s first theory, not his second.

This is a good example of Abelard's using his dialectical skill to dazzle his opponent. Later logicians would develop long treatises on how to treat the word 'differ' in contexts like this and various other contexts. Their analyses look pretty much like the one I have just given, which is why I think it is not implausible to interpret Abelard himself as pushing an early version of this kind of analysis. Abelard here presupposes an already finely-honed analysis.

Unfortunately, while it's very impressive, I think it is probably unfair to William. William might well reply that Abelard's fine logic doesn't show that the view is wrong, but only that it was badly expressed. The basic point is unaffected: Socrates has his own humanity and Plato has his own humanity, and there is no difference between them — that is, no third entity that comes between them and is required to make them two humanities. They are two all by themselves; they just come that way. Their humanities don't have to individuated or differentiated from one another by anything added on. They are already quite individual and distinct enough, thank you. There is a clear difference between this case and Abelard's case of the rock. Neither Socrates nor Plato has a rockhood (a "lapidity").

Abelard can hardly object to such a theory, when properly stated. For, in the end, it disagrees in no respect with his own, except perhaps on some minor terminological points that don't really matter. But Abelard is quite clear that his theory is not a realism, as apparently William thought his own was.

This completes Abelard's attack on William of Champeaux's two theories and their variations. It is important to notice just what he has done.

He seems to think he has refuted William's first, strongly realist theory. Perhaps he has scored some points against William's own formulation, but this type of realism can be touched up, at least in my judgment, in such a way that every single one of Abelard's objections misses the mark. (He does not raise the one objection that would have been a real difficulty, and would have required a major change in the theory: that it makes accidental change impossible.)

With respect to William's second theory, Abelard has indeed scored some points against William's way of expressing that theory. But his main success is elsewhere. He has pretty clearly refuted various attempts — (Pseudo-) Joscelyn, Walter of Mortagne, and William himself — to explain how William's second theory still amounts to a realism. There is apparently nothing on this theory, no non-linguistic entity, that is predicated of many. So if you are going to adopt a view like this one, you might as well just stop pretending you are a realist, confess that you are a nominalist, and just suffer all the shame and abuse William apparently thought went along with such an admission.

Abelard's Own Theory

This is precisely the conclusion Abelard himself draws (para. (63)):

It remains to ascribe this kind of universality only to words.

'Words' here = "voces," which I said earlier might best be translated 'utterances'. Only they are predicated of many. This passage marks a major point of articulation in the discussion. Abelard has now committed himself to nominalism (at least with respect to predication). We have yet to see how the details work out.

From para. (64) to para. (75), Abelard gives us some preliminary explanations of the grammatical sense in which words (= voces) may be called particular (= individual) or universal. I'm just going to skip over those paragraphs for present purposes. Then, beginning in para. (76), he raises some questions that will serve to lead into the core of his own view. There are two questions, both having to do with the "signification," in a broad sense, of those general or universal voces.

Recall that, according to John of Salisbury, the difference between Roscelin's theory and Abelard's was that for Roscelin universals were just voces (utterances)—spellable ("articulated") sounds produced by the vocal apparatus of an animal. They may or may not be significant. But for Abelard, universals were not just voces but also sermones—significant voces. So now we're going to start talking about the notion of signification.

(Now, an important warning. Be careful with the word 'significatio' in Latin. People often translated it as "meaning." For example, Richard McKeon in his translation of this passage. We'll have more to say about this term and how to translate it in just a moment. But to translate it 'meaning' is guaranteed to cause you trouble.)

Here are the two questions Abelard raises:

- (1) First, there seems to be nothing for a universal word to name, no "subject thing," as Abelard says (para. (77)). That is, universals are just voces = words, as we've just seen. But there seems to be nothing for a universal term to be truly predicable of. He has just argued that there are no universal entities in the realists' sense to be named by universal words. We'll see Abelard's answer to this question shortly.

- (2) But second, there doesn't seem to be anything for universal words to signify either.

Here we are back with this notion of “signification” again.

Let me give you a little lesson in the terminology of medieval semantics.

Aristotle, in *De interpretatione* 3 16^b19–21, says that verbs “signify” something just as names do. The point here is that he introduces the word ‘signify’. Why do verbs signify something just as names do? Because someone who uses a verb, Aristotle says, “establishes an understanding” — in Boethius’s Latin translation the phrase is ‘*constituere intellectum*’, usually construed with the genitive. Hence in general, terms signify what they “establish an understanding of,” or in more colloquial terminology, they signify what they make us think of when we hear them, or see them (if they’re written).

This passage came to be viewed as a kind of definition of signification in the Middle Ages. So “signification” for the medievals is fundamentally an epistemological/psychological notion.

This Aristotelian background is what’s behind the phrase at the end of para. (77) on p. 40: universal names don’t seem “to establish a firm understanding of anything.”

(Notice that it follows from this basic notion of signification, which all medievals used, that signification is a species of the causal relation, and is just as transitive as causality is. If A signifies B and B signifies C, then A signifies C. Some authors explicitly drew this conclusion. This, incidentally, is one reason why I regard it as wrong to translate ‘*significatio*’ as “meaning.” Meaning, whatever it is, is not transitive; signification is.)

In effect, therefore, the second of Abelard’s questions is “What does a universal term make us think of when we hear it?” Certainly, it doesn’t make us think of a universal thing, since he has just argued at length against William of Champeaux and others that there are no such things. But it doesn’t seem to make us think of any individual thing either. When I hear the word ‘man’, I am not made to think of Socrates any more than I am made to think of Plato. And I cannot be made to think of all men, since I don’t know all men. There are lots of people on the other side of the world (in fact, there are lots of them on the other side of the street) whom I have never thought of in particular. Surely, when I hear the word ‘man’, I am not made to think of them — except in some very general sense that seems impossible to explain, since we have no general entities on this theory.

In short, there are two problems: (1) Universal names don't seem to have anything to name or to be truly predicated of, and (2) they don't seem to have anything to signify or make us think of either.

Hence it looks as if universal terms cannot be sermones in Abelard's sense — that is, significant words or significant voces — since there is nothing for them to signify or name. It looks, therefore, as if Abelard's nominalism is committed to saying that universal terms are mere words without significance — mere flatus vocis, in Anselm's phrase — with all the consequences that entails for our knowledge of the world. How is Abelard going to avoid this? How is he going to distinguish his theory from Roscelin's?

Well, he does. He sketches his answer at paras. (86)–(87), before getting down to details. “But this is not so,” he says (86), p. 41.

Ad primum: First of all, what about naming? The objection here was that there is nothing for a universal term to name or be truly predicated of, because there is no universal thing for it to name. Abelard's response is in effect: “So what? Why can't the term name individual things?” In fact, that is what happens of course. The universal term ‘man’ is truly predicated of Socrates and Plato.

It's a little hard to see what is going on here, but it seems to run something like this. The problem arises only if (i) we think of naming or being truly predicated of as also a kind of signification (so that what a term makes you think of is what it is truly predicable of), and then (ii) recall that terms signifying more than one thing are equivocal. For example, ‘bank’ is equivocal, since it signifies both the financial institution and the side of a river. (See the remarks on equivocation at pp. 37–38, para. (65). **READ IT.**) So, the problem is this: How can a universal term be truly predicable of many things without signifying many things and so ending up being ambiguous — not univocal, after all? Compare the example of ‘Socrates’ in **para. (65)** on p. 38 (along with notes 22–23).

Abelard's reply in effect severs the notion of naming from the notion of signification in the sense of signification in which a term is equivocal if it signifies several things. Abelard is willing to allow that there is a sense in which naming is a kind of signification. Universal terms, he says, “in a way ... ‘signify’ diverse things by naming them” (p. 41, para. (86)). But that is not the kind of signification that is involved in equivocation.

It is not entirely clear to me why Abelard is willing to allow naming, or as he calls it “nomination,” to be a kind of signification at all — even “in a way.” But, whatever the reason, it is clear that naming is not signification in the sense that seems to be presupposed by the objection.

I think, therefore, that Abelard has successfully handled the first objection. His answer proceeds by taking the notion of naming as in effect identical with the notion of being predicated of, and then by distinguishing this notion from signification in the sense in which multiple signification would entail equivocation.

Ad secundum: But the second objection is harder. What are we made to think of when we hear the word ‘man’? In short, what is the link-up between our universal terms, our concepts, and the external world? How are we going to save Abelard’s nominalism from the epistemological skepticism it threatens to yield? This is the meat of Abelard’s theory.

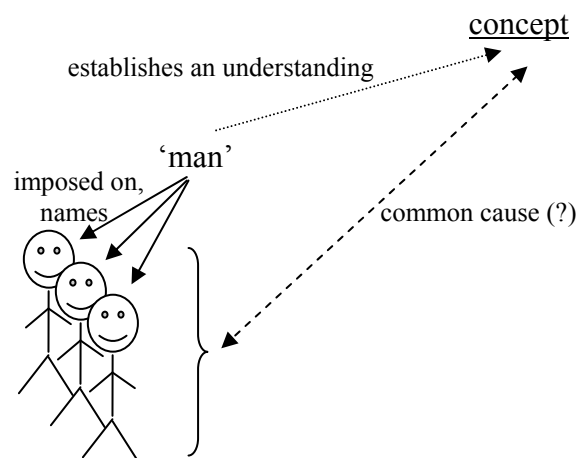
Well, here is where considerations about equivocation do apply. If a universal term is going to be univocal, it must establish in us a single understanding, a single concept. (‘Understanding’ in these contexts does not mean the faculty of understanding, but either the act of understanding or else the object of such an act.)

That concept has to be a general concept. But what is it a concept of? Not of a general or universal thing, since there aren’t any, as Abelard has argued at length. Neither does the universal term make us think of individual things, for the reasons we’ve already seen, reasons the objection states and Abelard apparently accepts.

And yet that general concept must somehow be grounded in those individual things, on pain of severing our thought from the world and reducing the theory to Roscelin’s.

There must, therefore, Abelard says (paras. (87)–(88), p. 41), be some common cause or reason why the universal term is “imposed on” the several individuals it names (“imposition” is the assigning of names to things), and so names the several individuals it does, and which links the name to the general concept we have when we hear the term. This

“common cause” is going to be the linkage between our concepts and the world that saves the objectivity of our knowledge. So it’s going to be pretty important. It



is whatever it is that answers the question, “What is it that links the general concept generated by a universal term with the individual things the term is truly predicable of?”

Well, how does it work? We need to look at both sides of the question: **(a)** at this mysterious “common cause,” and also at **(b)** the “common concept” that it grounds (para. **(88)**, p. 41).

Ad (a): We have seen that Abelard criticized William of Champeaux’s second theory for saying that, while Socrates and Plato had two distinct essences, nevertheless they agreed — “indifferently,” to be sure, but “agreeing” nonetheless — in man or in humanity. Abelard thought this was just a verbal smoke screen. He says instead that Socrates and Plato agree, or are alike in being a man, or in that they are men, or in being man (para. **(89)**, p. 41. **READ**).

So what? What is the big difference here? Well, there is a big difference. A man is a thing — a res. And there is no thing in which Socrates and Plato agree, no thing they can share, as Abelard has already argued at length.

Nevertheless, they must somehow agree, there must be some community between them, or else there would be no objective basis for our calling them both “men,” and we would be left with subjectivity and skepticism — and Roscelin’s doctrine. The common predication of the word ‘man’ of both of them must be tied to reality somehow.

Well, Abelard bites the bullet. Since Socrates and Plato cannot “agree in” or share any common thing, and since they must nevertheless have some community, it follows that they must agree in or share some non-thing, something that is not a thing — not a res.

They do not agree in man, he says (para. **(89)**), but they do agree in being a man (= *hominem esse*), otherwise translated as “to be a man.” Being a man, therefore, is not a thing.

This doesn’t mean that being a man is “nothing,” that it isn’t really out there. It is really out there. It has to be, since there is an important epistemological job for it to do. But it is not a thing — not a res.

Instead, it is what Abelard calls a “status” (fourth declension, so that the plural is ‘statūs’ — spelled the same, but with a long ‘ū’). This word ‘status’ as a technical expression is not unique to Abelard in the twelfth century. Other people used the word too. For example, Walter of Mortagne used it. But we shouldn’t assume immediately that the word always means the same thing for all these people. And in fact, in many cases it may not be clear just what a given author means by it. In any case, let’s look at how Abelard is using it here.

Socrates and Plato, he says, agree in the status of man — that is, in being a man, or in to be a man. “We appeal,” he says, “to no essence here” (para. (91), p. 42) — that is, to no thing.

Oh great, you may say. What on earth is going on? When it comes to the crunch, Abelard tries to fake his way out of the epistemological problem here by appealing to some contrived and utterly mysterious kind of “non-thing” he calls a status. That’s not a theory; that’s a sign of desperation! Isn’t Abelard in fact just throwing the whole thing away? Isn’t this mysterious status of man just the old realist universal man in disguise? Hasn’t Abelard distinguished his own doctrine from realism by nothing more than a verbal subterfuge?

This is a particularly pressing question once we realize that Abelard needs the status for basically epistemological reasons, and epistemology has always provided the main arguments for realism.

In order to see what is going on, we must remember the way Abelard defined a universal in the first place. A universal for Abelard, following the Aristotelian definition rather than the Boethian one, is what is predicated of many. And while Abelard seems perfectly willing to speak in some passages in his writings of things’ being predicated of things, he is not willing to allow things to be predicated of many things, since “it remains to ascribe this kind of universality only to words” (p. 37, para. (63)).

The universal man of William of Champeaux’s first theory was a universal because it was supposed to be predicated of many. (It was also, of course, universal in the Boethian metaphysical sense, but that isn’t the main sense at issue in Abelard’s discussion.) The status, however, which is just as objective, just as much really out there in the ontology, is not a universal in Abelard’s sense because it cannot be predicated of many. Why not?

What is the status of man? It is, Abelard says, being a man. Now ‘being’ is ambiguous in English. It can be either **(a)** an adjective (a participle, in particular), meaning that which is, or else it can be **(b)** a noun (a gerund, in particular) meaning what that which is does — namely, be. (Compare the difference between ‘the living and the dead’ = ‘those who are alive and those who are dead,’ and ‘Summertime, and the living is easy’ — that is, what those who are alive do is easy, namely living.)

In Latin, participles and gerunds are quite distinct verb-forms. What we have in the present case, where we are talking about being a man, is the gerund, the verbal-noun. And in Latin, the nominative of the gerund is the infinitive. So to make this perfectly clear, we can say that the status of man is to be a man (= *hominem esse*).

Now the Latin sentence '*Hoc est hominem esse*' (in English, 'This is to-be-a-man') is certainly odd, and perhaps even ill-formed.

(Note: There are some nasty complications here. In Latin as in English, there are some quite ordinary constructions where such gerund-constructions are in fact predicated. Consider 'To be Socrates is to be a human being', 'To run is to be moved', and so on. Some later authors will actually have a few things to say about these cases, but I don't know what — if anything — Abelard has to say about them.)

Now I am not very concerned whether you understand all the grammatical fine-tuning here. But the general point is important. Although Abelard doesn't exactly say so, I suspect this grammatical business is the reason why the status of man — to be a man or *hominem esse* — cannot be predicated of many. It cannot be predicated of many because it cannot be predicated at all. It is simply of the wrong form. It results in gibberish.

Syntactically, this is just a matter of grammar. Metaphysically, it can be approached somewhat differently.

The theory of the categories may be regarded as providing a list of the basic kinds of predicates. ('Κατηγορία' just means "predicate" in Greek, remember.) But the status of man does not fit into any of the ten recognized Aristotelian categories. Hence, it cannot be predicated, and so a fortiori cannot be predicated of many. To-be-a-man is not a substance, although any given man is. And to-be-a-man is certainly not an accident. So it doesn't belong in any of the categories.

It follows of course that the status not only cannot be predicated of many, it cannot be predicated of even one. Hence the status is not only not a universal, it is not an individual either. I suspect this is what Abelard means when he says that the status is not a thing.

Way back at p. 28, para. (17), near the very beginning of our passage from Abelard, he quoted Aristotle's *De interpretatione*, the beginning of Ch. 7, as saying that some things are universal and others are individual. And that's exactly what Aristotle does say — he says things. Now, although Aristotle doesn't exactly say so, it certainly looks as if this is intended to be an exhaustive division; all things are the one or the other, either universals or individuals. Abelard disagrees about universals, of course, but the point is that since the status cannot be either an individual or a universal, it follows on the authority of Aristotle that it cannot be a thing at all.

Again, in another passage later in the *Logica ingredientibus* (this time from the *Glosses on the Categories*), Abelard says that the categories signify the ten primary genera of things. (See pp. 66–67 in the *Notes and Texts*, passages II and

III). Presumably then, since the status does not fit into a category, it is not a thing. But it is still out there.

To some extent, this is sheer speculation based on scattered texts. In the end, Abelard simply is not very informative about these non-things. But something like this must be going on, or else I simply do not see how everything Abelard says can be reconciled.

At this point, let us recall the two kinds of realism we have in circulation:

- (a) Predicational realism, the view that there are real, non-linguistic entities predicable of many. This is based on Aristotle's definition of a universal in *De interpretatione* 7.
- (b) Metaphysical realism, the view that there are real entities — whether you want to call them “things” or not is up to you — that are common as a whole, simultaneously, and in a metaphysically intimate manner, to several things. This is based on the definition given by Boethius in his *Second Commentary on Porphyry*.

Now I have an interpretation of Abelard's theory that seems on the whole to make sense of the texts. But I must confess the texts do not force this theory. It is just that I don't know how else to interpret them. Furthermore, while my interpretation does seem to accommodate the texts — or at least those I'm familiar with — it doesn't leave Abelard with a very attractive or adequate theory, for reasons we'll see in a bit.

For better or for worse, here is my tentative interpretation of Abelard. Abelard is a nominalist in the Aristotelian, predicational sense, but a realist in the Boethian, metaphysical sense. His doctrine of the status fits Boethius's definition of a universal. He explicitly says all human beings “agree” in the status *being a man*. And he calls it the “common cause” of the imposition of the term ‘man’. This might just mean that it's a “common cause” in the sense in which the sun is a “common cause” of all living organisms on earth. In that sense, being a “common cause” is just a matter of being a single cause of several effects, and there's nothing metaphysically realist about it. The sun is outside the structure of the effects it causes, so that it violates the third condition of a Boethian universal (the “metaphysical intimacy” condition”).

I say this might be what's going on, but I don't believe it. First of all, in the case of the sun we have several effects, and the sun is a “common” cause in the sense of being common to all those effects. But here we have only one effect, the imposition of the term ‘man’, the process whereby it is assigned its significative

role. So it would seem that the status can't be a "common cause" in the sense of having many effects, but only in the sense that there is something common about it. And the only plausible way I can think of to make that out is the kind of metaphysical commonness Boethius has in mind: the status to-be-a-man is one metaphysical entity (we can't call it a "thing," remember) that "constitutes the substance" of all men in the required metaphysically intimate way.

I confess this is all highly speculative and tentative. But if it is so, then Abelard is one of the few people in the Middle Ages for whom the difference between the Aristotelian "predicational" and the Boethian "metaphysical" definition of a universal actually makes a difference. It is only in the predicational sense that he is a nominalist: there is nothing except for terms in language that is predicated of many on Abelard's doctrine. But there are shared or common metaphysical ingredients, in pretty much the sense Boethius talked about.

It is the logical doctrine of predication, therefore, that is at the heart of Abelard's nominalism. He is a nominalist only in the "predicational" sense. So when I said a little while ago that William of Champeaux' second theory in effect agreed with Abelard's own theory, although Abelard didn't think it was the whole story, and that his main quarrel with it was the claim that it was still a realism, I meant realism only insofar as predication is concerned. There is nothing on William's second theory that is predicated of many, even though he and his followers seemed to be unwilling to accept that consequence — at least to hear Abelard tell it.

Now, there's an additional question you might have at this point, and it would be a good question. Here it is: If Abelard does end up being a metaphysical realist but a predicational nominalist, then what happened to his arguments against William of Champeaux's first theory? After all, wasn't William's first theory just a version of this kind of metaphysical realism? And Abelard mercilessly attacked that theory, as we have seen. It would be ironic indeed if his own view turned out to say pretty much the same thing.

Well, what were Abelard's objections against that theory? **(1)** The first objection, you will recall, was that on this theory contraries would be in the same thing at the same time, and this would violate the Law of Contraries, which says that contraries can't do that. **(2)** The second objection was that there would be only ten essences for all things, and that since each thing has features from several categories at once, it would follow that there would be only ten things in all — or, even worse, only one thing with features from all ten categories! **(3)** The third objection was that William's theory destroyed the difference between universals and individuals, since the reason we say humanity is a universal is because it has several forms inhering in it, and Socrates has several forms inhering in him in the

same way. (4) The fourth objection was that William's theory reverses the priority of individual substances to their accidents.

I'm afraid I don't really know what to say here. There are two lines of response I can think of. (a) One is to recall that, in my own estimation, Abelard's objections against William's first theory may have scored some points against it, and in particular against certain other things William held that, when combined with the metaphysical picture behind this theory, led to absurd or otherwise unacceptable results, but that it didn't really refute that metaphysical picture. All right, what do you expect? That is exactly the metaphysical picture Abelard himself has. So you could really shouldn't expect his contrary arguments to be completely persuasive. You have to remember that Abelard's arguments appear in the context of the preliminary arguments in what amounts to a *quaestio*, so that you can't assume that he believes the arguments he is presenting.

(b) The second line of response is perhaps not all that different. It is to say that Abelard doesn't really think there is anything wrong with William's first theory metaphysically speaking. His objections are that William goes wrong only when that theory is combined with other unfortunate claims he makes — in particular, claims about predication. The common factor in Socrates and Plato, then, really is common — that's not the problem. But it's not a thing, which means it has nothing do to with predication. This works best perhaps with the first line of objection, about the Law of Contraries. The whole notion of "contraries" is a logical notion, and logic is fundamentally about predication and about what can be predicated of what. It also works well with the second objection, insofar as 'category' (recall) just means "predicate." (And in fact, '*praedicamentum*', related to '*praedicatum*', is one standard word for 'category' in medieval Latin, even though Abelard in the second objection speaks in terms of "*generalissima*.")

In short, this second response amounts to saying that what I presented as the failures of Abelard's arguments against William's first theory, are not failures at all; they are by design. Abelard means to be attacking not the underlying realist picture behind William's first theory, but only the other features of his doctrine that William was foolish enough to combine with that underlying picture.

In the long run, I'm not sure what to say here. This is still a loose end in my understanding of Abelard. There is still a lot of work to be done before we finally have a firm grip on what Abelard is up to.

This then is the end of our treatment of Abelard's first question back at p. 41, para. (87)–(88), the question about the common cause of imposition. The reason

the term ‘man’ is “imposed” on Socrates and Plato, and all other men, is because they all have the common status: being a man, or to be a man. And this common status may plausibly, although conjecturally, be interpreted as a metaphysical universal in the Boethian sense, even though it is not a “thing” and is not predicated.

Ad (b): Now what about the second side of our problem, the question of the “common concept”? What does a universal term, after all, signify or make us think of? What is the concept the concept of?

At this point, you might well ask: What about the status? Wouldn’t that serve? Perhaps it would. If the status is “common to many” in the Boethian metaphysical sense, and so is a “Boethian” universal, it would seem to be tailor-made to be the one object conceived by the concept “man.” But, oddly, Abelard doesn’t take that route, for reasons we shall see a little later. On the contrary, for some reason he seems to think a term must signify a thing, not a “non-thing” like the status.

To ask the question as precisely as possible: What is the thing of which a universal term “establishes an understanding” or concept? There must be only one, under pain of equivocation. (Terms that signify different things are equivocal, recall, even though univocal terms can very well nominate — “name” — different things.)

Well, since what the term signifies can’t be any real “thing,” as Abelard has already argued, it is, he says (p. 43, para. (96)), “a kind of imaginary and made-up ‘thing’” — a *res ficta*, in Latin. That is to say, apparently, it is purely an intentional object, a thought object, a thought thing. It is in no sense real — not even in the sense in which the status is real even though it is not a “thing.” The thought object is a “thing,” only it is a fake thing — a metaphysically impossible thing, if Abelard’s arguments against William of Champeaux’s realism are correct.

So to the question “What does the universal term make us think of, since there can’t be any universal thing,” Abelard’s answer is: “No problem. It makes us think of a universal thing, even though there can’t be any universal thing.

Later people, at the end of the thirteenth century and afterwards, will distinguish real being (= *esse reale*), which all of us enjoy, from intentional being (= *esse intentionale*), which thought objects must be content with. (‘Intentional’ here is taken in the sense that thought intends or aims at, “tends towards,” its object, whether the object is real or not. ‘Intentional’ does not here mean “on purpose.”) This is the germ of the doctrine of intentionality that will play such a big role in modern phenomenology. Brentano claimed he got this notion from the Scholastics. Well, he didn’t get it from Abelard; he got it from later people. But

we can already see the germ of it in Abelard. Another term for it in the later Middle Ages is “objective being” (*esse objectivum*) — in the sense of the being an “object of thought” has. (You may recall that Descartes uses the term ‘objective reality’ in his *Third Meditation* in exactly this sense.)

Digression

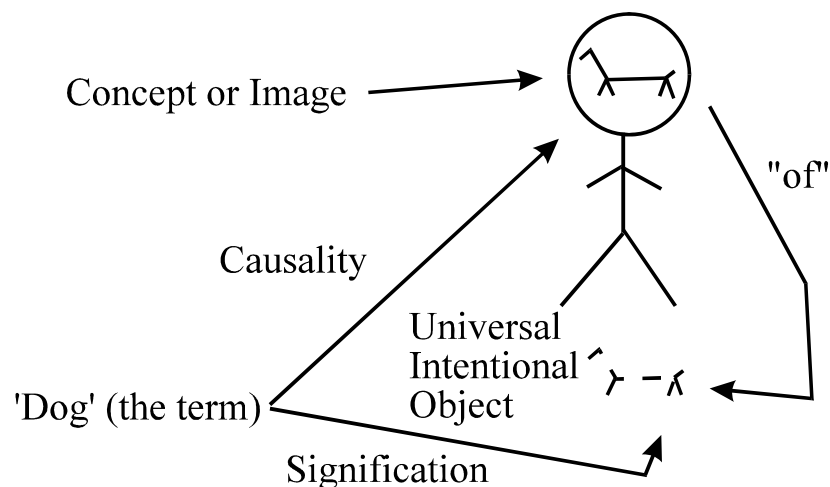
There seems to be some obscurity in Abelard concerning this *res ficta*. Is it some kind of mental representation, or is it some kind of impossible objective entity in the world?

On the one hand, he seems to think this *res ficta* is a product of the activity of the mind, like dream images, and that it is this product we are made to think of when we hear a general or universal term. (See p. 43, para. (96), “The imaginary cities seen in a dream....”)

On the other hand, later in the *Logica ingredientibus*, in his *Glosses on the De interpretatione* (see p. 67 in the *Notes and Texts*, item IV), he seems to say that such images or figments are not what we think of when we hear a general term, and so not its significate, but are rather the mental products that are the means by which we think of what they are images of. We do not think of the images, we think of things through the images.

In short, on the former interpretation, the *res ficta* is identified with a mental image, while on the latter the *res ficta* is identified with the object of thought, the intentional impossible object that the image is an image of.

The terminology, at least, and perhaps the content of the doctrine as well, are fluid here. Perhaps the best way to view it is this: The universal term establishes in us (that is, causes in us) an understanding, a concept, regarded as a kind of mental picture. That concept or picture is of a metaphysically impossible general object. Since terms signify that of which they establish an understanding in us, not that understanding or concept itself, it is the impossible intentional object that is signified by the universal term, not the concept or image of that object. Thus:



Just which of these — the impossible intentional object or the understanding or concept of that object — is to be called the *res ficta*, I am not clear. But it seems to me most plausible that the *res ficta* is to be identified with the intentional object, not the concept or image, and it is that *res ficta* that is signified by the term. But if I am wrong about this, and the *res ficta* is to be identified with the concept or image, it is easy to make the terminological adjustment. In that case, the term will signify the intentional object of the *res ficta* or image.

End of Digression

This theory is an account of all terms, not just of universal ones. Proper names as well as universal terms produce or establish in us a concept or image of an intentional object thing, which object the term signifies. In the case of a proper name, of course, the intentional object is an individual and so may also be a really existing thing. For universal terms, however, this cannot happen.

At p. 43, para. (100), Abelard suggests an exception to this. A proper name — say, ‘Socrates’ — need not produce in us a concept or image of Socrates, he says, provided that Socrates is present in person and I perceive him. In that case we do not need the image in order to be made to think of Socrates; the reality suffices. But where Socrates is absent, I do need his image in order to think of him. Where the term is a universal term, however, there can never be a universal thing really present to my perception, since there are no universal things out there at all. Hence for universal terms we always need an image or concept in order to think of what they signify.

(There’s perhaps a problem here. If t signifies x , then t “establishes an understanding” of x , as we’ve seen. But what is this understanding that’s

established, if there is no concept or image, but only the object itself — as with proper names when the object itself is present to us?)

Before we get too far afield, let me point out something. At p. 43, para. (97), Abelard considers a view that denies that concepts or images are products of the mind's activity at all, but instead identifies the concept or image with the very act of thinking itself. Abelard doesn't really argue very fully against this theory, but he says he disagrees with it (para. (98)). It is an interesting theory, because after toying with a "fictum theory" very much like Abelard's, William of Ockham in the fourteenth century will opt for the act-theory Abelard here rejects, the theory that concepts are identical with the mental acts themselves, not with the products of those acts.

So far, then, we have a fictum-theory for Abelard, a theory that applies equally to general concepts and to particular or individual ones. What is the difference between these two kinds of concepts? The distinction is drawn beginning at p. 44, para. (102).

Particular or individual concepts are mental pictures or images that represent one thing to the exclusion of others — for instance, the image of Socrates. General concepts are mental pictures or images that represent several things at once. They are in that sense "confused" concepts. This does not mean that there is anything wrong with them, or that they are stupid. It means that they con-fuse or "fuse together" a number of things. The concept "man," for instance, is equally a picture of every man. It is not any more a picture of Plato than it is of Socrates, or vice versa. But it is more a picture of those men than it is of anything that is not a man.

Well, this is troublesome, since we want know just how this is supposed to work. At pp. 44–45, para. (108), Abelard gives us a troubling analogy. He says we can paint a picture of a particular lion — "limping, maimed, or wounded by Hercules' spear," as he rather oddly puts it. But we can also, he goes on, paint a picture of no lion in particular, but of a lion in general. This of course suggests Abelard is leaving himself wide open to all the objections Berkeley would later raise against the notion of abstract general ideas — objections based precisely on the identification of concepts or ideas with mental images. (We cannot imagine a triangle in the abstract, the objection goes; any triangle we actually picture to ourselves will have to be either equilateral, isosceles or scalene.)

Whether Abelard can answer such objections or not, the analogy with painting still seems to be a bad analogy. Nevertheless, let's not push the point. We can then summarize Abelard this way:

- (1) In the presence of an individual to the senses, a proper name — for instance, ‘Socrates’ — brings to mind Socrates himself, and also signifies Socrates. No image or mental picture is needed.
- (2) In the absence of individuals to the senses, a proper name — for instance, ‘Socrates’ — brings to mind the image or picture of Socrates, but signifies the individual Socrates himself. It does this whether Socrates exists or not.
- (3) A universal term — for instance, ‘man’ — brings to mind a general picture or concept of no one man in particular, but of a man in general, and signifies the metaphysically impossible man in general that I think of through that concept or image.

Thus, terms as a whole signify a realist world, a world with universal things in it — only that realist world is a world of intentional objects, not exclusively of realities. Realism is the correct theory for the world we picture, the world we think of, as realists have argued all along. (Recall, realism’s strongest arguments are based on epistemology.) It is, unfortunately, not the correct theory for the world that exists.

Realism, if it thinks universals are real, extra-linguistic things, makes the mistake of regarding the world that is signified as the real world. Abelard thinks it is not. His distinction between naming and signifying properly speaking makes this outcome possible.

Boethius, in his *Commentary on Porphyry*, adopted a version of moderate realism, as we saw. He said we can separate in the mind things that cannot be separated in reality. We can form abstract, general concepts although there is no such thing as a general or universal thing. Abelard is in effect just accepting this theory, but spelling it out in more detail. Unfortunately, he complicates matters by identifying concepts with mental images.

You may well think this whole outcome is a rather ironic one for a doctrine that is trying to preserve the objectivity of our knowledge. After all, the upshot of the whole thing is that the world we think about, and so the only world we could even have a chance of knowing, is not the world that exists, but rather a metaphysically impossible world populated with universals. What kind of objectivity does a doctrine like that preserve?

This brings us back to a question we put off a while ago: Why cannot the status serve as the significate of a universal term? Why cannot the term ‘man’ make us

think of the status of man? It seems to be just the kind of significate we want. It is common to many, even though it is not predicable of many. And it would clearly ground the objectivity of our knowledge if it were the significate of the universal term — that is, if we were to think of it when we heard the term ‘man’. In that case, the universal term could make us think of something real, even if not strictly a thing, and not of some impossible universal thing predicable of many. The world that is signified, the world we think of or conceive, would then be just the real world after all, and knowledge would be saved.

The reason Abelard does not adopt this attractive approach is that he thinks we cannot form a mental image of a status.

Before I give you my reasons for saying this, I should mention one important scholar who disagrees with me. It is Martin M. Tweedale, in his *Abailard on Universals* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1976)—on reserve in the main library. On p. 208 of that book, Tweedale takes Abelard to hold that universal terms do signify the status. I find no text to support this claim, and indeed I think the whole business about painting pictures of general lions goes against this interpretation. But there is one passage in particular (p. 45, para. (112)) where I think Abelard definitely — although perhaps obliquely — rejects it. At p. 45, para. (110), Abelard asks whether a universal term signifies the form to which the understanding is directed. And in the context, he is talking about the intentional object, not the mental image. And he goes on to say yes, this view is “confirmed both by authority and by reason.”

Note that he’s talking about the intentional object. What we want to know now is whether or not this is the same as the status.

Note also the pairing of authority and reason in this paragraph: that the universal term signifies the intentional object, he says, is “confirmed both by authority and by reason.” This pairing will become a regular theme in later authors. Be aware of it, because it goes a long way toward disabusing us of the common but facile view that medieval philosophers had an overly slavish respect for authority. They did appeal to authorities, no doubt about it; they did it all the time. But they almost always paired that appeal with a matching appeal to philosophical reason, as here.

The “authority” he cites in this case is one Priscian. Priscian was an important Latin grammarian from around 500 AD. In a rather obscure passage quoted by Abelard in para. (111), Priscian seems to suggest, Abelard says, that the Divine Ideas — that is, God’s concepts — are concepts of the statūs of things.

It’s easy to make a case for this, since the metaphysical structure of creatures is supposed to be patterned after the divine ideas. This suggests that the ideas are ideas of the statūs, which do enter into the metaphysical structure of things, rather

than of metaphysically impossible universals, which do not. Otherwise, it's hard to see how the Ideas could be patterns at all.

Just how we get from this to the conclusion Abelard draws, that the universal thought object is what universal terms signify, is not very clear. But in any case, Abelard seems to accept that conclusion: it is confirmed, he says, "by reason." What he doesn't accept — and here I think Tweedale misinterprets the passage — is the suggestion that this signified intentional object is the status.

That's fine for God, Abelard says, but not for us (p. 45, para. (112)). The objects of his universal ideas are the statūs of things; but not the objects of ours — because we cannot form an image or concept of the status. We have no way to picture accurately what it is to be a man. That is because, Abelard says, the status cannot be sensed; it is not a sensible quality. We have no perceptual access to it, and therefore do not know how to picture it — we "men," he says, "who know only through the senses" (p. 43, para. (113)). Note this claim well. It is quite an unusual claim for its time, when the prevailing tradition was the Platonic/Augustinian tradition of "illumination," a tradition that tended to downplay the importance of the senses in acquiring knowledge. Abelard here sounds surprisingly Aristotelian, given that he didn't have any more of the Aristotelian texts available to him than did the earlier medievals. I have no idea where he is getting this claim.

At any event, the only features we know about things — say, about human beings — are their sensible qualities, so that the picture we make up for ourselves when we hear the term 'man' must be constructed out of those ingredients. (Note that quality is one of the standard Aristotelian categories, so that sensible qualities are things.)

God's knowledge, however, is not confined to what can be sensed, so that God can picture the statūs of things. The connection between thought and reality is much closer for God's thought than it can ever be for our own.

Very well, but what does all this mean for the connection between our thought and reality in the final analysis? How is it supposed to work?

Well, the status provides an objective non-arbitrary grounding for the imposition of terms. The term 'man' is "imposed" to name all men because they are men, because they agree in being men. They share a common status. It is, recall, the "common cause" of the imposition of terms.

The term cannot signify that status, however — at least not to us — because we cannot picture it. But we do the best we can, and form a kind of monstrous image of no one man in particular, but of an impossible man in general. This image is serviceable; it might, for instance, guide us in knowing what to count as a "man,"

since it is after all equally a representation of every man and of nothing quite so much as a man. It can serve that function. But it is too indefinite and indeterminate to be an exact image of any possible reality. And there is where the old realists made their mistake.

Before we turn to an evaluation of this theory, let us look briefly at the end of Abelard's discussion. From para. (125) to para. (142), pp. 47–51, there is a further discussion of abstraction, taken from Boethius's *Commentary on Porphyry*. Then Abelard turns to answer the four questions he raised at the beginning of the passage. (Recall how Abelard added a fourth question to Porphyry's traditional three.) This discussion occupies the rest of the passage, from para. (143) to the end.

- (1) With respect to Porphyry's first question, whether genera and species subsist, Abelard glosses this as: Do the words — general and specific words — signify something real, or are they purely mental, that is, do they not signify something real? Abelard's answer: Both. They signify in a loose sense, by nomination — that is, they name or are truly predicable of — real things. But those real things are individual things, not universal ones. On the other hand, in the other sense of 'signify', the strict sense (what the terms make us think of), they signify nothing real, but only a fictive intentional object. That fiction nevertheless is not exactly empty, for the reason explained in his discussion of abstraction.
- (2) As for Porphyry's second question, are genera and species corporeal or incorporeal, Abelard glosses this as: Do they (the general and specific words) signify corporeal things or incorporeal things. And again Abelard's answer is: Both. And once again, he trades on the two senses of signification. Loosely and by nomination, they do signify corporeal things; in the strict since they do not, but only signify fictions. (Note: He seems to be implicitly confining himself to general terms for material things here.)
- (3) With respect to Porphyry's third question, are genera and species in sensible things or separated from them, Abelard glosses this as: Do genera and species words signify things in sensible things or do they not? And once again, as you no doubt have come to expect by now, his answer is: Both.

By nomination, they signify or name things in sensibles. (Presumably, once again, this is supposed to hold only for terms involving material objects. Abelard doesn't seem to be thinking of any other kind here.) For instance, 'humanity' signifies (names) the humanities in Socrates and Plato. But more strictly, such terms signify the common intentional objects, those impossible things that are not really in a sensible object (or anywhere else) but are only fictions.

- (4) Finally, what about Abelard's own, fourth question: Can universals continue to exist without any singulars? Again, he parses this: Can universal terms continue to signify as they do even if there are no singulars that fall under the universal, no individuals for such terms to be predicated of? Again, his answer is, once more: Both. They obviously cannot signify then by nomination, but just as obviously they can continue to signify in the strict sense; they can signify the common intentional object.

The distinction between nomination and signification in the strict sense is therefore the main vehicle for Abelard's answering the four questions that frame his discussion. But don't be fooled. As we've seen, there's a lot more than that going on in this passage.

Now, let us pause to evaluate this theory. It is subtle and deep, no doubt, but I think it just won't work — at least not insofar as I understand it. What, after all, leads us to form exactly the image we do when we hear the word 'man' — an image of an impossible man in general, but an image that is nevertheless equally if not exactly a representation of just exactly those individuals who share in the status of man?

What a coincidence! Isn't it odd that the fit should be so exact? It seems that this must be an extraordinary coincidence unless we are led to do this by somehow getting in touch with the status. The status must guide us. But how can that be? On Abelard's own account, we cannot sense the status and so cannot form any concept or picture of it.

It looks as though we can have no inkling at all of the status of things. And if that is so, then while the status may very well be out there, it can be of no epistemological use to us whatever — and the whole project breaks down.

It is extremely instructive, I think, to reflect on why the project breaks down. It is because, on Abelard's own account of human knowledge, he provides no way in which we can be led by the status in forming the images or concepts we do. There is no way to do this for him because we cannot sense the status, and so have no way to get in touch with it.

But doesn't this confirm — or at least illustrate — a point I made earlier (right before we began talking about Abelard), that the epistemological difficulties of nominalism only arise if one assumes a kind of empiricist epistemology. Not necessarily an empiricism that relies on sensation, as it does with Abelard, but an empiricism at least in the sense that our knowledge of x must ultimately be derived from x itself, not from something else.

If Abelard had not had such an epistemological theory — and as I said earlier, such a theory was a bit odd in Abelard's day — and if he had adopted instead something like the traditional Augustinian theory of illumination, which might very well put us in touch with the status of things, since after all God's knowledge is of the status of things, and presumably he could impart that knowledge to us in illumination — then it seems to me his theory would have worked out better. Or alternatively, Abelard could have allowed us to have an empirical knowledge of the status of things, just as God has.

Either way would do: We could form correct universal concepts of individual external objects by coming into empirical (not necessarily sensory) contact with their common status. Or else we might adopt a theory of illumination, or some other theory, to allow us to have a non-empirical knowledge of the status of things, on the basis of which we can form correct concepts of individual external objects.

But by insisting on the epistemological theory he did — a theory that requires us to get our knowledge of objects empirically and then forbids us from having any empirical knowledge of the status of things — Abelard appears to condemn his own doctrine to failure.

Now let's come up for some air. We've looked at two main figures so far, along with several other people. We've looked at: Boethius and Abelard. They are roughly 600 years apart, and in a sense stand at opposite poles on the problem of universals.

The majority of texts in Boethius seem to point in the direction of a so called "moderate realism," a theory that is nominalist with respect to the existence of

universals (there aren't any), but then tries to save knowledge by an appeal to a theory of abstraction. The attempt fails, I have argued. The basic metaphor behind the Boethian view appears to be the “seal-ring” picture that goes back to Plato's *Timaeus*.

There are other passages in Boethius that might be read in a more realist way, and at least one passage in his *Second Commentary on the De interpretatione* that pretty clearly has to be read that way. (See pp. 43–44 of the *Notes and Texts*.) But on the whole, the seal-ring picture, with its distinction between “forms” and “images,” and with both matter and accidents playing important roles in the construction of individuals — that is the predominant Boethian theory.

Abelard, on the other hand — at least in the passage we have read — is a more complicated story. If we judge Abelard from the point of view of the metaphysical notion of a universal that we got from Boethius's *Second Commentary on Porphyry*, he is an out and out realist. Universals are what he calls the statūs of things. They are present as a whole, simultaneously, and in a metaphysically “intimate,” constitutive way, to several things.

On the other hand, curiously, Abelard's realism does not save his epistemology. His insistence, on the one hand, that human beings get all their knowledge from the senses, combined on the other hand with the view that we do not have any sensory contact with the statūs of things, prevents those statūs from playing any epistemological role, and therefore prevents Abelard from reaping the epistemological benefits of his realism.

On the other hand, if we judge Abelard by his own definition of a universal as what is “predicated of many” — a definition that goes back to Aristotle and can be found in Boethius as well — Abelard turns out to be a nominalist. There are no universal entities predicated of many; only words are.

We are now about ready to plunge into the later Middle Ages, with all its refinements and complications that come with the recovery of the texts of Aristotle, and the translation of the great Islamic philosophers, especially Avicenna (on this point — others were more important on other philosophical questions).

As we shall see, one of the themes that will keep coming up again and again in our future discussions is the notion of unity and identity. We have already seen this to some extent in Boethius, who began his argument against universals with the observation that being and unity were convertible, and then argued that since universals were supposed to be shared by a plurality of things at once, that

plurality of things would somehow infect the universal itself and make it a plurality too — with the result that, since it could not be one, it could not be at all.

We followed Boethius's discussion a long way, but we never found a fully satisfactory explanation of this move—the “contagion” theory of plurality, that the plurality of things to which a universal is supposed to be common somehow infects the universal itself and makes it plural too. We did make some progress a while back when we talked about Plato's *Parmenides*, with its claim that if the Forms were shared in the way Socrates was suggesting in that dialogue, they would be “separated from themselves,” which at least sounds like a violation of some kind of logical principle of identity

Let's look at the question again now. Only this time, let us not look at it from the point of view of the texts of Boethius, or the texts of anyone else in particular. Let's just look at the problem in the abstract for a moment.

What I am about to give you is a discussion that is intended to serve two functions at once: **(a)** it will help to fill in the missing step in Boethius's argument, and **(b)** it will serve to sharpen our sensibilities to questions of unity and identity that will be coming up in what follows.

The argument I am about to give you has been called “Spade's salt shaker argument,” since I first came up with it at a dinner-table conversation with some students the first time I taught this course, and I used salt and pepper shakers to illustrate my point.

Step (1): Let us begin by considering once again the notion of an aggregate whole or aggregate unity. This is the same as the notion of a “mereological whole” I discussed earlier, in connection with Joseclin of Soissons' “collection”-theory of universals. I am here calling them “aggregates” only because I think the phrase “aggregate unity” sounds a little more like English than “mereological unity” does. But nothing rests on the terminology.

If you are familiar with Nelson Goodman you will perhaps recognize that what I am talking about is in effect included in what Goodman is talking about in his so called “Calculus of Individuals” — as, for example, in his *The Structure of Appearance*. Goodman uses the term ‘individual’ in a much broader sense than I am going to want to do, so once again I prefer to call these things “aggregates” or “aggregate wholes” or “aggregate unities” rather than “individuals,” as Goodman does. The term ‘aggregate’ is meant to be relatively theory-neutral here, at least to begin with.

For example, consider this pile of stuff on the table. There is a perfectly good sense — although a sense that we might not be able to articulate very fully at first — in which it is one object, one thing; it is one pile.

Or, consider a somewhat odder example. Consider the one object consisting of my wrist-watch, your grandmother and the planet Mars. That too is a perfectly good object, a perfectly good “individual” in Goodman’s sense of the word — it’s what I want to call an “aggregate.”

Basically, the notion of an “aggregate” I am trying to focus on here is the notion of a pile or heap, with the added possibility that the things in the pile or heap don’t have to be close together or in contact with one another.

That last clause is what allows us to have so called “scattered individuals,” such as the “Goodman-style” individual consisting of my wrist-watch, your grandmother and the planet Mars. It’s a possibility Goodman emphasizes strongly, but you may want to play it down — or perhaps even reject it. Nothing I am about to say rests on whether or not the components of an “aggregate” can be widely separated in space, or for that matter in time.

This notion of an “aggregate,” or a “Goodman-style individual” in the broad sense, is not some new or recent notion that would be only an anachronism in our discussion of the Middle Ages. We’ve already seen something very much like it in Joscelyn of Soissons. And it is not unreasonable to find it, or something recognizably akin to it, in Aristotle: See, for instance, *Metaphysics* V.6, and *Metaphysics* X.1. In both passages, Aristotle is describing various kinds of “unity.” His notion of what I want to call an “aggregate unity” seems to require physical contact or “continuity” among all the parts, but I said that doesn’t matter for our purposes.

I remind you also of a point I emphasized when I was talking about Joscelyn of Soissons: mereological wholes, or what I am now calling “aggregates,” are not sets.

Now I am not really concerned with the details of mereology, or “aggregate theory,” or Goodman’s “Calculus of Individuals.” All I want you to understand for now is that there is this notion of a kind of compound, aggregated object, and that we are not talking about sets.

All right, that’s **Step (1)**, to introduce this notion of an aggregate object.

Step (2) is now to contrast this with the notion of what I want to call an individual. NOT merely an individual in Goodman’s sense — because I said he used that term very broadly. (In fact, “individuals” in Goodman’s sense include what we have just been calling an aggregate.) Rather, what I now want to call an individual is an “individual” in a different and somehow “stronger” sense of the word.

I am not now in a position to analyze exactly what the difference is between the notion of an aggregate and the notion of an “individual,” in the sense in which I now want to use the term. But I can say enough, even now, to show you that there is a distinction to be drawn here.

For example, consider yourself — as a biological and psychological unity. Think of your various parts — your physical parts, first of all: your foot and your head, and so on. Then also your various metaphysical ingredients: your qualities and features and characteristics, your size and shape, and weight, and color, and so on. Also the mental side of you (whatever your theory of the mind is): your thoughts and memories, and so on.

Isn't there an obvious sense — which of course does not necessarily mean a sense that we analyze adequately just now — an obvious sense in which all those parts and features and characteristics and ingredients go together in you? Aren't they all somehow unified in the one object that is you?

I think we would all say yes. And, even without yet being in a position to say just what that sense is, we can see that it is plainly somehow different from the sense in which the pile on the table is unified. You are not just a “pile of parts.”

Or, if you don't like that example, consider a more theoretical argument. Unless you're prepared to countenance an infinite regress and say there is nothing that is not an aggregate of more basic ingredients (it's aggregates “all the way down”), you must allow for something that is one — can be counted — but is not an aggregate of more basic parts.

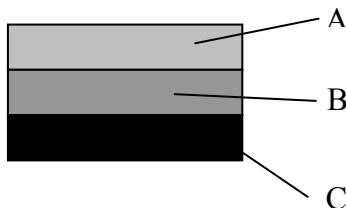
So we have then two notions:

- (a) the notion of an aggregate whole, with its relatively weak and loose kind of unity. (Any old things can be regarded as making up an “aggregate.”)
- (b) the notion of an individual — not necessarily a “Goodman individual” but a “real” full-blooded individual, with its relatively stronger and stricter — or in any case, different — kind of unity. (Not just any old things can be regarded as making up a robust “individual” in this sense.)

Note that it's not really important for now how you rank these different kinds of unity. I've called sense (b) the “stronger” and “stricter,” the more “robust” sense. But it doesn't matter for now.

Now, **Step (3)**: Let's notice an important characteristic of aggregates.

Consider three bricks: A, B, and C. And let's put them one on top of the other, so that we don't have to worry about their being widely separated in space, as Goodman allows (but does not of course require).



Now consider the object consisting of bricks A and B, and the distinct object consisting of bricks B and C. Both of these are perfectly good aggregates; there's nothing wrong with them at all.

But notice: Brick B is in both aggregates, in both AB and BC. And for that matter, it is also in the larger aggregate ABC.

This is an important feature of aggregates: things can be constituents of several aggregates at once. That is, distinct aggregates can have some of their constituents in common; they can “share” them, so to speak. There is nothing funny or especially problematic about that.

Finally — and here's the punch — **Step (4)**: Suppose you are a realist, so that you believe in universals that are common to or shared by several things at once.

Then, a question for you: What is the difference between the way in which your universals are common to or shared by several individuals at once and the way in which brick B is common to or shared by the aggregates AB, BC, and ABC?

There must be a difference, or else the two cases in effect collapse into one, and there will be no relevant difference between individuals and mere aggregates. Individuals would turn out to be mere aggregates of individuals. (Note: Not Joscelyn's theory, where universals are aggregates of individuals, but just the opposite.)

But we all agreed that there is such a difference, back in **Step (2)**. Individuals, we said, were somehow unified in a stronger, or at any rate different sense than mere aggregates are.

We were not then in a position to analyze exactly what the difference between those two senses was. But initially we agreed that there is such a difference that we hoped would continue to be there after analyzing and clarifying these notions.

If, as a result of our analysis and theory, there is no longer any distinction between individuals and mere aggregates, then we have lost something we initially wanted to keep.

On the other hand, you realists, if there is a difference between the way in which universals are common to their several individuals and the way in which brick B is common to the aggregates AB, BC, and ABC, then **you tell me what it is**.

Don't resort to a metaphor, now! Tell me what it is! Don't tell me that the relation between universals and individuals is a primitive notion that cannot be further explained, but is in any case different from what we have in the case of aggregates. That's not a theory; it's an admission that you have nothing enlightening to say on the point, combined with a request that we nevertheless overlook that failing and believe you anyway.

By contrast, the nominalist, who does not have any universals to account for, can quite straightforwardly state the difference between individuals and aggregates that we said back in **Step (2)** was a distinction we wanted to preserve. Individuals are such that their constituents cannot at the same time be constituents of other individuals, whereas aggregates are such that their constituents can at the same time be constituents of other aggregates. Full stop, end of paragraph.

Or, to put it formally:

Let sentences of the form $CP(\alpha, x)$ be read " α is a constitutive part of x ."

Then where x and y are individuals, we have

$$CP(\alpha, x) \ \& \ CP(\alpha, y) \leftrightarrow x = y.$$

But where x and y are aggregates, that does not generally hold.

And there we have a quite clear distinction the nominalist can draw.

Some things to note here:

- (1) The task here is not to distinguish individuals from universals — recall Abelard's frequent objection that his opponents' theories blurred this distinction. Rather here the task is to distinguish individuals from aggregates.
- (2) Why can't the realist explain the difference between individuals and aggregates the same way the nominalist can? Because in addition to all the entities the nominalist has in his ontology, the realist also has universals, which

are metaphysical constituents of many individuals, thereby violating the way the nominalist characterizes individuals.

- (3) Does this mean the realist is in effect committed to the infinite regress I mentioned a moment ago (“aggregates all the way down”), that the realist really can’t have “robust” individuals in the ontology without just postulating them by *fiat* and being utterly unable to say what counts as an individual?

The reply to that is: it depends. The realist might very well have entities that fit the nominalist’s characterization of an individual. That is, the realist too can have entities that do not share metaphysical constituents with anything else. But they will be the most general universals — either the ten categories, or the universal being (which might be a universal, after all, even if it can’t be a genus), but not what the nominalist was treating as individuals.

In short, you won’t be an individual any more, although being (or perhaps the category “substance”) will be. You, on the other hand, will be simply an aggregate of universals.

Nominalists therefore can very well have individuals as well as aggregates of individuals. Realists, on the other hand, can very well have universals as well as aggregates of universals. The problem is to have all three, individuals, aggregates and universals, and to be able to say what the differences are among all three.

What we have as a result of all these considerations might be regarded as a metaphysical argument in favor of nominalism and against realism. But by now we ought to realize that issues are not so clear-cut as that. What we really have, it seems to me, is an illustration — and in fact the clearest and strongest illustration I know of — of the metaphysical difficulties of realism. Realism tends to — threatens to — destroy our notion of an individual, to dissolve individuals and turn them into mere aggregates — aggregates of universals.

That may be a consequence you are willing to live with, a price you are willing to pay. But it is not something we were willing to accept to begin with. To begin with, we said there was a distinction there that we would like to preserve. I’m not just a “pile” of metaphysical parts. The realist may therefore have to pay a real price that the nominalist does not have to pay.

The only alternative is for the realist to come up with some explanation of the distinction, an explanation that does not, as soon as you press the point, degenerate into hand-waving and metaphor.

If you think about it, there is nothing whatever that is new about the set-up I've just given you. As early as Boethius, we saw that realism runs into difficulties over the question of unity, even though Boethius himself never succeeded in spelling those difficulties out very fully. How can a universal be shared by many individuals at once in a way that keeps them individuals?

As early as Plato's *Parmenides*, we saw the question of how universals were related to their individuals, and the question was left hanging. (Recall that unlike the Forms in the "seal-ring" passage in the *Timaeus*, the Forms in the *Parmenides* appear to be thought of as really universal — that is, they do enter into the structure of individuals, in a way in which they do not on the "seal-ring" metaphor.)

And even today, the question for realists is: How do you explain instantiation, exemplification, participation, or whatever you call the relation between universals and their particulars?

The considerations I have just given you amount to setting up the problem in as sharp a way as I know how.

What we have seen then is a question that focuses on matters involving unity, the notion of an individual, and so on. These notions will be crucial in what follows — that is, in the later Middle Ages. Let us turn to that now.

The Later Middle Ages

With this we are going to have to abandon a strictly chronological approach, and begin to skip around a bit. We will be approaching things now more from a topical point of view. And while we are treating a certain topic, certain people will be discussed. When we turn to another topic, some of those same people may be discussed again, but others will now enter into the picture. And so on.

We begin with Thomas Aquinas on the principle of individuation. Then we will turn the clock back to Avicenna to discuss the notion of so called "common natures."

Reading Assignment: Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*. There will be a lot in this that will be irrelevant to our present concerns, but read it all anyway. It's not very long.

Aquinas lived from 1224 or 1225 to 1274. (He was probably not quite 50 years old when he died.) He was an Italian by birth, and by vocation a member of the Dominican order of Friars. The Dominicans were just getting started at that time,

and so Aquinas, getting in so to speak at the ground level, soon acquired the status of the more or less “official” philosopher and theologian of the order. Although he traveled around a fair amount, most of his academic writing was done at the University of Paris.

On Being and Essence (= *De ente et essentia*) was one of Aquinas’s earliest treatises, written sometime before March of 1256 — that is, when was 31 or 32 years of age. One of the main influences on Aquinas in this work was the great Islamic philosopher Avicenna, who lived 980–1037, and whom we will be meeting again later at much greater length.

To begin with, let us go back to our by now famous “seal-ring” theory, as for instance we found it in Boethius, with the distinction in his *De trinitate* between forms and images. And recall also the so called *binarium famosissimum*, the “most famous pair” — that pair of twin doctrines that always seemed to be found together in the Middle Ages: **(a)** the doctrine of universal hylomorphism and **(b)** the doctrine of plurality of forms. I discussed this pair of doctrines in the *Warp and Woof* handout. If you’re not familiar with it, please go back and get familiar with it.

The pair of doctrines in the binarium is nicely represented in the “seal-ring” picture, as I discussed in that handout. (The binarium is perhaps not entailed by the “seal-ring” picture, but they are certainly quite comfortable with one another.)

Now let’s look at history for a moment. After the time of Abelard and his immediate successors in the mid-12th century, the problem of universals basically “died out” for a while. That is, people didn’t discuss it — or, if they did, it was only in a perfunctory way, without any really original and new contributions. The fact is, people seemed to be interested in other things in the late-12th and the first part of the 13th centuries.

This was the time of the “translations.” All of a sudden, and for reasons that might make an interesting study, people started translating lots and lots of works into Latin. These included translations directly from the Greek, and also from Arabic (and to a lesser extent from Hebrew). Much of this work was done in Moorish (that is, Islamic) Spain, where the Latin and Arabic worlds met. These translations, through Spain and elsewhere, included works of medicine, mathematics, exotica from the East brought back as a result of the Crusades, and so on. And they included also a lot of philosophical works, including basically all the remaining works of Aristotle, as well as new translations of the *Categories* and *De interpretatione*, which they already had from Boethius. It also included

the works of the great Muslim philosophers, including (but by no means limited to) Avicenna, whom we have already mentioned, and Averroes. Averroes was one of the all-time great commentators on Aristotle. He lived in Spain from 1126–1198 (and so was a quite recent figure as far as Thomas Aquinas was concerned). His commentaries were so good that the Latin came to call him simply “the Commentator.” So when you see “as the Commentator says,” they are talking about Averroes. (There is one exception: The *Nicomachean Ethics*, for whom the “Commentator” was one Eustratius of Nicaea.)

Perhaps it was because people were too busy trying to assimilate all this new material to try to say anything new and original on their own. But, for whatever reason, the problem of universals — and all the correlative problems that go with it — were in “eclipse” from roughly 1150 to roughly 1225. (These are very rough dates.) And of course, when people did begin to think about these issues again, the old traditional doctrines, including the “seal-ring” doctrine, were still live and available options — although they were often now reformulated in more rigorous, precise and technical ways.

In particular, the “seal-ring” picture, perhaps in a refined and more sophisticated form, came to be viewed as a good-old, familiar, conservative, and therefore “safe” theory. It was one that people felt comfortable with. It was not the only theory to be viewed this way, but it was one of them. And a lot of people held it in Aquinas’s day — particularly among the Franciscan order.

And Aquinas rejected it. Or at least he rejected it in its most common and familiar interpretations.

Along with the “seal-ring” picture, Aquinas also rejected the twin doctrines of the binarium famosissimum that the picture represented so well.

For present purposes, I’m not so concerned with the doctrine of plurality of forms in the sense discussed in the *Warp and Woof* handout. I want to concentrate instead on the other half of the binarium, the doctrine of universal hylomorphism.

The theory of universal hylomorphism makes two claims that I want to distinguish for present purposes. Both are illustrated clearly by the “seal-ring” picture. They are:

- (1) Everything except God is a composite of matter and form. (MENTION THE NOTION OF “SPIRITUAL MATTER.”) Or in the terminology of Boethius’s *De trinitate*, everything except God is an image of a Form or divine idea in matter. (Let’s not worry for now about whether this means that matter

itself is a composite of matter and form. Matter is going to be funny on any theory.)

Claim (1) is pretty much definitive. That is, it is the claim that constitutes the theory of universal hylomorphism. In other words, on this theory all creatures are material.

- (2) Again, provided only that you don't worry too much about what to say about matter: Only God is entirely simple. Everything else is composed of distinct ingredients, which for the hylomorphists are matter and form.

Claim (2) doesn't exactly follow from (1), since there might be other kinds of "composition" besides a composition of matter and form, and God might turn out to be composite in those other ways. But the hylomorphists typically held (2) as well as (1), and implicitly held that composition is always a case of matter and form, a determinable factor and a determining factor. Recall the "seal-ring" picture once again. The wax is indeterminate, and by itself has no particular shape at all. The ring determines the wax to take on the particular shape it does.

Recall also how we found William of Champeaux, in his first theory (the "material essence/advening forms" realist theory, not his later "seal ring" nominalism), talking about how higher genera were "material" with respect to the differences that divided them, which differences played the role of "forms." And recall how, even in Porphyry and Boethius, we saw that the genus is — if perhaps only metaphorically — like matter with respect to the differences, which played the role of "forms."

Now Aquinas rejects universal hylomorphism, and so denies (1). But he accepts (2); only God is absolutely simple. He accepts this for other reasons, which we'll look at in a bit. Since he accepts (2), it follows that all creatures are composites. Thus, since he also rejects (1), it follows that for Aquinas there must be some other kind of composition besides the composition of matter and form.

Note: When we say that God is absolutely simple for Aquinas (and for everyone else), we do not mean to rule out the doctrine of the Trinity, according to which there are three really distinct persons who are all identical with the one absolutely simple God. How you sort all that out is a theological question that is certainly relevant to this course, but I don't want to try to get into it.

Aquinas's reason for rejecting (1) is given in *On Being and Essence*, Chap. 4, § 2, pp. 52–53. I'll just refer you to it here; if you want to go into it in more detail, you should look at this handout, from "The Course in the Box," Vol. I, Chap. 56

(particular near the beginning). Otherwise, the passage will probably be unintelligible to you. (DISTRIBUTE HANDOUT “SOME MAIN THEMES IN AQUINAS.”)

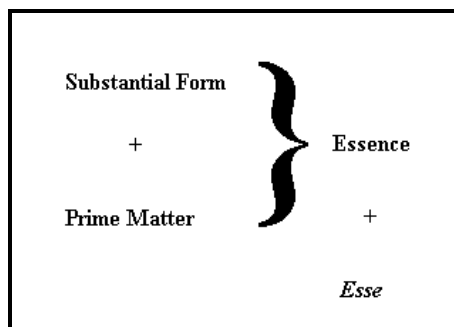
For Aquinas, we said, there must be some other kind of composition besides the composition of matter and form. That is one kind of composition, all right. But there is a more basic one. Aquinas says that, for everything except God, there is a composition of the things’ essence with its existence.

‘Existence’ here translates the Latin infinitive ‘esse’ — literally, ‘to be’. So Aquinas is talking literally about the composition of a thing’s essence with its to be. This sounds less odd in Latin than it does in English, because in Latin the infinitive functions also as the nominative of the gerund, as I mentioned with I was talking about Abelard’s theory of status. (We sometimes do this in English too, as in ‘To run is to move’.) For this reason, the word is sometimes translated into English as ‘being’. This is OK, but I prefer not to translate it this way, because it is easily confused with ‘being’ in the participial rather than the gerundial sense. The two are not distinguished in English. What we want for now is “being” not in the sense of a being, but rather in the sense of what a being does: the act of being. To avoid this potential confusion, I refer to translate ‘esse’ as “existence.”

The composition of essence and existence or essence and the act of being is absolutely crucial to Aquinas’s whole philosophy and theology. How it works is a long story. But here is a first rough map of the territory:

For Aquinas, the things that exist can be divided into three classifications:

- (a) Material creatures. These have an essence, and that essence is a composition of prime matter and substantial form, in the sense distinguished in the *Warp and Woof* handout. But in addition, there is a second composition in them, a composition between the essence as a whole, including both the matter and the form, and the esse or the thing’s act of existing.



- (b) Spiritual creatures. These include the angels (what the medievals called the “intelligences,” which term never means human cognitive powers in medieval usage), and human souls. They too have an essence and an act of existence, an esse. So there is that composition present in them. But, unlike material creatures, the essence of spiritual creatures does not involve a composition of prime matter and substantial form. The essence is purely a substantial form — and that’s all. There is no matter involved. That is why we have a spiritual creature, after all, and not a material one.

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{Substantial Form} = \text{Essence} \\ + \\ \text{Esse} \end{array}$$

- (c) God. God, we said, is absolutely simple. Not only do we not have a composition of matter and form in God, we do not even have the composition of essence + esse. Yet God certainly exists (let us take this for granted here — Aquinas of course has some arguments for this); there is an act of existing involved. Hence, we must conclude that this is all that is involved. God is nothing but a pure act of existing, a pure esse, “*ipsum esse subsistens*” = “subsistent being itself.”

$$\text{Esse}$$

If you want, of course, you can say that God has no essence on this picture. Alternatively, you might say that he does have an essence and that it is identical with his esse, his existence. In part, this is purely a terminological point, provided you are clear that God does not have an essence in any way distinct from his existence.

Now of course all this raises a whole host of pressing questions, and if this were a course on Aquinas exclusively, I would go into as many of them as possible. In this course, however, I will only be able to look at a few of them.

First, just what kind of distinction are we talking about between a thing's essence and its existence (except in the case of God, of course).

Well, this was a question that many people in Aquinas's own day found hard to answer, and some of them simply rejected Aquinas's version of the distinction. On this, you may want to look at John Wippel's book on Godfrey of Fontaines (see the handout on "Reserves"). He discusses many of these people. Don't be misled by the fact that you may never have heard of Godfrey; the book is very illuminating about lots of people.

Modern commentators too have found it hard to say clearly exactly what is going on here with this "distinction."

On the one hand, the distinction has to be a real distinction, in the sense that it can't just be a sort of artificial distinction the mind cooks up on its own without any corresponding ontological division out there in the object. If it weren't a "real" distinction in this sense, then the composition of existence and essence would not be a real composition, but only a kind of manner of speaking. And if the composition were only a manner of speaking in this way, then there would seem to be no real basis in the end for distinguishing God from creatures on this theory (or least God from spiritual creatures). And that, of course, is in effect a reductio. The distinction must be "real," and not merely a fabrication of the mind.

But when it comes to just exactly what kind of real distinction this is, the literature is filled mainly with confusion. Much of the problem arises, I think, from interpreting Aquinas here in the light of later medieval theories of distinction that we will find, for example, in John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. For the later people, the criterion of a real distinction always involved some kind of separability. Not separability in space, necessarily, but separability in the sense that if two things are really distinct, then at least one of them can exist even if the other one doesn't.

This was a fairly standard criterion of "real distinction" after Aquinas, and to some extent before, but plainly it cannot be what is involved here. Essence and existence are not separable in creatures in this way. If a thing's essence could exist without the thing's existence, then why on earth would you need the thing's existence in the first place? And conversely, you can't have the existence of the thing all by itself, without having the thing itself, including its essence. Plainly this is not what Aquinas has in mind.

Some scholars, therefore, have pointed out that in people like Scotus there is not only the notion of a real distinction in the fairly strong sense I just described (in

terms of separability), but also another kind of distinction that is real in the sense of not being a mere fabrication of the mind — it corresponds to some ontological distinction out there in reality — and yet is not a “real” distinction in the sense that involves anything as strong as separability. This was what Scotus called the formal distinction, and it is very important. We will look at it later.

Aquinas himself sometimes speaks of a distinction that some scholars have regarded as a kind of prototype of Scotus’s “formal distinction.” This is what Aquinas calls a distinction of reason with a foundation in reality. That is a very slick notion, and we may look at it too later. But in any case, most scholars are pretty much agreed, I think, that Aquinas’s distinction between existence and essence is not to be interpreted as this last kind of distinction.

So the secondary literature is a mess on this topic.

I have my own suggestion to make here. And, while I am by no means a specialist on Aquinas, nevertheless I think it’s right.

The main thing is not to look at the problem in terms of the later history of the theory of distinctions, but rather to think of it in terms of the notion of efficient causality.

You recall that Aristotle distinguished four kinds of causality: The material and formal causes were simply the matter and form of a thing. The final cause was the goal or purpose for which it was produced. But the efficient cause, as it came to be called, was the cause that produced the thing.

Now Aquinas explicitly tells us (*Summa theologiae*, I, q. 3, a. 7) that:

Every composite thing has an efficient cause, for realities of themselves diverse cannot unite to constitute one single thing save by some cause binding them together. (Gilby translation.)

There are other passages like this; it is not an unusual passage in any sense.

The idea then is that things that are really distinct don’t just happen to be found together. Something has to put them together. This is an important and substantive philosophical claim. It’s not by any means automatic. It deserves a lot of thought. Indeed, I suspect that, although it isn’t talked about very much, it’s perhaps as deeply engrained in the Philosophical Tradition as the Principle of Sufficient Reason is.

In fact, I think this is pretty much the whole notion of “efficient cause” for Aquinas. The efficient cause is the “putting together” cause, the “com-posing” cause — the “ef-ficient” = “making out of” cause.

Some corollaries:

- (1) This is why, incidentally, God has to be absolutely simple. If he weren't, then he couldn't be the uncaused cause at the head of the causal chain. He would be composite, and so dependent on a prior efficient cause.
- (2) It is also why everything other than God — that is, every creature — is composite. If it weren't, it would not need an efficient cause. It wouldn't need an efficient cause — that is, a cause to com-pose it, because it would not be com-posed; it would not be composite. It would not need an efficient cause, and in fact could not have one; there would be nothing for an efficient cause to do. Things other than God, therefore, would not have to be created; they could exist without being created, which of course is not what we want. Part of the doctrine of creation is that everything besides God is created by God.

Thus, God is absolutely simple, and everything else is in some way composite. It follows from the doctrine of creation plus the notion of what efficient causality is.

(This fulfills my earlier promise to explain to you why Aquinas accepted the claim that only God is absolutely simple, even though he rejected the hylomorphists' reasons for saying so.)

So we have this link-up between the notion of efficient causality and the notion of composition. We can use this link-up in two ways:

- (1) We can take the notion of a “composite” as relatively clear, and use it then as a kind of “primitive” notion to explicate the notion of efficient causality. That is a very attractive thing to do, because in a sense efficient causality has always been the most mysterious of the four kinds of causality. Just what does an efficient cause do? To say that the efficient cause is the “putting together” cause seems to be a real step forward in our understanding of this mysterious notion.
- (2) But I propose to take advantage of this link-up here to go just the other direction. In the present instance, the murkier and more obscure notion seems to be the notion of composition: what is this “real composition” of “really distinct” existence and essence for Aquinas? That's our problem right now.

And we can now answer that problem in terms of efficient causality. In other words, I suggest that for present purposes we take the notion of efficient causality as our starting point — explaining it as best we can in some other way — and use it to explicate the notion of real distinction and the real composition of essence

and existence in all creatures. To say they are “really distinct,” then, is just to say it takes an efficient cause to make the essence exist.

Here is an example. It is perhaps a little labored, but I hope it will make the point. The example is of the form “just as, so too” And please note that the two parts are formulated in exactly parallel ways. (That’s the whole point of the example.) Here we go:

Take, for example, buttered bread. Now it required an efficient cause to butter the bread. That is, to make the bread be buttered. This means, since efficient causes are just “putting together” causes, that something must have put the butter on the bread, and that therefore the butter and the bread are distinct and got put together. To say they are really distinct and that there is a real composition here is just to say that it really took an efficient cause to butter the bread. (Of course, in this example, the butter and the bread are also really distinct in the stronger sense that they can exist separately in the way I described earlier. But that doesn’t affect the point.)

So too — and this is the point — here is a created individual. That individual is an existing essence (compare “buttered bread”). Now the individual, we said, was created, which is to say it required an efficient cause to make the essence exist (compare “to make the bread be buttered”). This means, since efficient causes are just “putting together” causes, that something must have combined the essence and the existence of this individual, and that they are therefore distinct. To say that they are really distinct and that there is a real composition of essence and existence here is just to say that **it really took an efficient cause to make that essence exist, to bring it about that the individual was really created.**

And, if I am right, that is all it means for Aquinas.

Notice the way I just put this: I said the individual was just an existing essence. Now you may wonder about that. After all, essence is supposed to be what is given by a real definition, as we learned as long ago as Porphyry. And real definitions were always given in terms of genus + difference, which yielded species. So essence, it appears, stops at the level of species. It stops at the level of the species in the sense that Socrates and Plato must in some sense have the same essence. (Just what sense that is remains to be seen.) But if that is the case, then when that essence exists, how can we say that the existing essence is this

individual, Socrates (say), any more than that individual, Plato? In short, how can I say that an individual is just an existing essence?

Nevertheless, I do say it. And so, in effect, does Aquinas. Essence stops at the level of the species, but an existing essence is an individual. This suggests that existence is going to have a very important role to play in Aquinas's theory of individuation. And it does.

But before we get into that, let's say a little more about Aquinas's claim that existence and essence are really distinct, and about how we are to think about this funny ontological factor called existence.

Aquinas was by no means the first to draw a distinction between existence and essence. Avicenna, for instance, in the eleventh century, had already appealed to such a distinction in his ontology. And, in the early thirteenth century, one William of Auvergne — a very interesting author whom we won't be able to say very much about (he later became Archbishop of Paris) — picked up on Avicenna's distinction and made it an important part of his own philosophy. For both Avicenna and William, however, the existence of a thing was viewed as a kind of accident that its essence may or may not take on. For these authors, this was simply another way of saying that creatures are contingent things and do not have to exist.

Aquinas doesn't approach the matter this way. Avicenna and William, by calling the existence of a thing an accident, betray the fact that they are thinking in terms of forms. The existence of a thing is clearly not its matter (especially not in the case of an immaterial thing), and if there is a real distinction between essence and existence, then the existence of a thing cannot be its substantial form either. (The kind of distinction these people had in mind is not the distinction between whole and part, but rather the distinction between two components of a joint product.) As long as we are thinking only in terms of matter and form, it appears then that the only thing left for existence to be is an accidental form.

But Aquinas says no. For him, accidents are ontologically dependent and derivative; they are ontological parasites that get all their reality from the substance of which they are the accidents. But the existence of a thing is what gives it reality, not the other way around. So existence cannot be an accident of a thing. It follows, therefore, that existence is not a form at all.

And with that move, Aquinas has introduced a whole new ingredient into the philosophical scheme of things, in addition to matter and the various kinds of forms in the traditional ontologies (substantial forms and accidental forms). Existence is something entirely different.

Let's look briefly at one of the consequences of this move:

If you think back to the Aristotelian theory of knowledge that I mentioned briefly when we were talking about Boethius (see also the handout on "The Greek Background") — the theory according to which the knower takes on the form of the known through a process that involves, first of all, sensation and then a kind of abstraction that results in a concept — you will see that, on such a theory, form is what we grasp in concepts. Form is what gets "impressed" on the intellect, with the result that we are "informed," and acquire "information." Hence, if the existence or esse of a thing is not a form, we can have no concept of it. We have no concept at all of a thing's existence.

But that certainly sounds odd. If we have no concept of it, then what have we been talking about? Well, we have to explain carefully what we mean:

We have no concept of a thing's esse that is a concept acquired by acquaintance. That is, we have no simple concept of existence, got by abstracting it from things we have observed, after the fashion of Aristotle's theory of abstraction. If we did, then the esse of a thing would have to be a form after all.

But to say we have no simple concept of a thing's esse, acquired by acquaintance, is not to say we cannot construct a complex concept that describes existence accurately. After all, prime matter is not a form either, and yet we can still talk about it intelligibly, and even conceive it after a fashion, as "that which underlies forms in changeable substances, and makes them changeable," or something like that. So too, we can construct a complex concept that describes existence as "what makes a being a being," or something like that. ('Being' there is taken participially in both occurrences.) This is what Boethius was talking about as "composition."

In short, we can form a kind of mental job description of a thing's esse, just as we can of matter, even though in neither case do we have any direct cognitive acquaintance with what fills that job description.

The fact remains, then, that we have no real understanding of esse, in the Aristotelian sense of "understanding," no "intellection," acquired by experience. We never really get at a thing's esse by way of concepts. Rather, it is in judging that we get at a thing's esse. And indeed, without going too far in the direction of a "picture theory of language" of the naive kind we saw in Frege, we can nevertheless say that the copula of a subject/predicate judgment, just as it joins the parts of the judgment together, so too it reflects or mirrors the composition in the thing itself.

This is a complicated parallel that some commentators have tried to make much of, although Aquinas himself doesn't seem ever to develop the point very thoroughly — or at least not in any text I am familiar with.

With these preliminaries, let us now turn to Aquinas's theory of individuation. We've already seen that there is reason to think the notion of esse will play a role here. Let's look more carefully.

Recall the distinctions we drew when we were discussing the problem of individuation in Boethius's *Theological Tractates*. At that time, I said we can distinguish at least three different questions under the general heading 'problem of individuation':

- (a) What is it that makes something an individual, rather than a genus or species? This is what we earlier called the "principle of individuality."
- (b) What is it that makes an individual the individual it is? We earlier called this the "principle of identification."
- (c) What is it that distinguishes this individual from that one? This we called the "principle of differentiation."

Be warned: These are my terms, not Aquinas's or any other medieval author's that I know of.

Ready? Here we go:

In Aquinas's doctrine, a thing's esse is its principle of identification. That is, it answers question (b): What is it that makes an individual the individual it is?

What makes Socrates to be Socrates is just his own act of existing, which is unique and private to him. What makes Plato to be Plato is likewise just his own act of existing, which is just as unique and private to him. (There are questions and problems here, but just be patient. This is only a "first pass" over a very complex and nuanced doctrine.)

So when it comes to counting individuals, and you want to know "How many individuals do we have here?" the answer is that you have as many individuals as you have acts of existing. In a given material individual, for example, the matter

does not have its own act of existing, substantial form another, and perhaps the accidental forms yet other acts of existing. No, there is one act of existing that actualizes the whole thing, and therefore we have one individual.

(This, incidentally, is Aquinas's answer to the question I raised some time back, when I discussed Goodman's "calculus of individuals" and the problems realists have distinguishing the unity of a real individual from the unity a mere heap or aggregate has. Aquinas's answer is that a real individual has one esse, while a heap will have several — one for each individual in the heap. So Aquinas has a ready answer to that challenge. Of course, we still have to see to what extent, if any, he is a realist.)

Let me give you a particularly striking consequence of the thesis that esse is the principle of identification, a consequence that will drive the point home forcefully:

Consider Socrates the man. He is a substance, and in particular, he is a rational, sensate, organic, corporeal substance (according to the Porphyrian tree), so that his essence involves the presence of matter. Now consider Socrates's soul. It too is a substance, since it is capable of existing in its own right, and in fact does so exist after Socrates dies; souls are immortal for Aquinas. (Incidentally, Aquinas saved some of his very best work — and Aquinas at his best is pretty impressive — for his arguments for the immortality of the soul. But I am not going to go into them now.

When the soul continues to exist in this way after death, it of course does not have matter and is not in matter. (That is, it does not have any matter of its own, as a kind of internal component, and it is not attached to matter any longer either, to yield some third thing as a kind of product. Socrates's soul is entirely separated from matter; he is dead, after all.)

Thus, while the essence of Socrates the man requires matter, we just said, the essence of his soul does not. They are different essences.

Nevertheless, Aquinas says — and here comes the punch — even though there are different essences involved, the soul that continues on after the death of Socrates is the same individual as Socrates the man was when he was alive. It is the same individual because it is the same act of existing. If it were not the same act of existing, and so not the same individual, there would be no personal immortality. The soul that survived death would not be the same person who died, so that it would make little sense to reward or punish it. So too, it would make no sense to pray to the saints, since the souls hovering around up there would not be the same people who lived such holy lives down here in this vale of tears. The

soul that survives is thus the same individual, but not the same substance, as existed down here in this life.

Once again, there are lots of doubts and questions about this. But, once again, I'm just going to skip over them here.

So esse or existence is the principle of identification. Socrates's existence makes him Socrates, and Plato's existence makes him Plato. And, as I said, the number of individuals you have is ultimately a question of how many acts of existing you have.

But, you may well ask, how do you distinguish acts of existing? What is it that makes Socrates's act of existing distinct from Plato's act of existing, so that they are two? Well, for Aquinas, this amounts to asking: How do you distinguish Socrates from Plato? And this brings us to the principle of differentiation, the answer to question (c) above.

Now, before we go any further, let's make sure we know exactly what problem question (c) raises, so that we'll know exactly what kind of principle of differentiation we are looking for.

We are not here concerned with the general question what makes one thing distinct from another. We are concerned only with the more particular question what makes one individual distinct from another.

The term 'individual' in this context doesn't just mean any old thing that might be counted as "one" entry in some kind of list or other. (After all, we can talk about "one pile of things.") It means an "individual" in the sense of the Porphyrian tree — that is, an "individual" as contrasted with a genus or a species. Thus, to talk about "an individual species" or "an individual genus" is just sloppy terminology; what we should say instead is "one species" or "one genus."

Remember also that the structure of the Porphyrian tree is supposed to apply equally well to all ten Aristotelian categories, so that we can talk about "individual" accidents as well as "individual" substances. For example, Socrates's whiteness as distinct from Plato's whiteness, even if their skin-colors are of exactly the same shade and hue.

(If you ask: "Does this talk of 'individual accidents' mean that the Porphyrian tree is incompatible with the "Boethian Layer-Cake Ontology" we discussed in connection with the *De trinitate*?" the answer is: It looks that way. On the Boethian Layer-Cake Ontology, accidents were universals, and individuals were built up only as the intersections of several such universals, including universal

accidents. The Porphyrian tree is by no means an ontologically neutral picture. And, although everyone accepted it, it turns out to be harder to fit into some theories than into others.)

Now individual accidents are going to turn out to be differentiated from one another, for Aquinas, by the individual substances to which they belong. That is, the differentiation of accidents is parasitic on the differentiation of substances. So our basic question is going to be about the principle of differentiation for individual substances.

Now my reason for stressing this is that we are not concerned here with the question what makes one substantial form, for instance, distinct from another, or what makes a quantity distinct from a quality. We are not concerned with what makes the ten categories distinct from one another. And we are not concerned with what makes esse distinct from essence. We saw earlier that for Aquinas the distinction between esse and essence amounted to saying merely that creatures were causally dependent on an efficient cause. We're not concerned with any of that right now.

For Aquinas, there simply is no principle of differentiation in those cases, and there doesn't have to be. There is nothing that distinguishes all those things from one another. They are just distinct all by themselves. They just "come that way."

As I argued earlier, any ontological theory that allows for plurality in the world is going to have to grant at some point that certain things are just distinct all by themselves, and require no "principle of differentiation" to keep them distinct. If this were not so, then every time you introduced a new entity to distinguish one thing from another, you would be forced to introduce yet further entities to distinguish your new one from all the others. This will result either in an infinite regress that never gives us the promised explanation for the distinctions among things, but rather keeps putting off that explanation to the next step. (That may be a result you are willing to accept, I suppose.) Or else your theory will end up trying to hide its embarrassment in a cloud of metaphor, of the sort that we're all too familiar with from reading — well, reading bad philosophy!

Perhaps there is some subtle philosophical theory that gets around all this. But I do not think so, and even if there is, it is certainly not a theory that was maintained by anyone we are studying in this course. So I will not argue the point any further.

We are concerned — to return to the point — only with the principle of differentiation for individual substances.

At this point, you might well ask: Well, why not just say that they don't have or need any principle of differentiation either, that they too just come that way?

Some authors in fact said just that. For instance, William of Ockham, who was a fairly strict nominalist.

But Aquinas doesn't do that. He thinks we do have a principle of differentiation for individual substances — and based on that, a kind of corollary principle of differentiation for individual accidents too, I suppose. But the latter point will pretty much take care of itself automatically once we differentiate individual substances.

So, when we get right down to it, what we are asking about in the end is the principle of differentiation for individual substances only.

After all that, here we go:

For Aquinas, the principle of differentiation in this sense is form. And it works like this:

Individual A is distinct from individual B if and only if the one has some form the other one doesn't have.

Write that down, and write it down exactly the way I put it: “the one has some form the other one doesn't have.” Don't say: “they have different forms,” or something like that. That is not the same thing. If A and B had to have different forms in order to be distinct, then God — who has no forms at all, but is a pure act of existing, “*ipsum esse subsistens*” — would not be distinct from created individuals. And that, of course, would be pantheism in a fairly strict sense of the term. In order to accommodate the case of God, therefore, we say not that A and B have different forms, but that one has some form the other one doesn't have. All creatures have essences that consist perhaps of prime matter in part, but in any case of a substantial form at least. So any creature will have a form that God doesn't have, and therefore be distinct from God.

With that technicality out of the way, let us consider now how individual created substances are differentiated from one another. And here we must divide the question into subcases:

- (1) If created individual substances A and B are **not** in the same species, then their substantial forms will differentiate them. Since they are not in the same species, they will have different kinds of essences, and therefore different kinds of substantial forms, and nothing more need be said. We don't need to ask how the substantial forms are different; they are structurally different from the very outset — they just “come that way.”

Note that this holds no matter what kind of creaturely substances A and B are, provided only that they are in different species. If they are both material substances, then — since matter is just matter, and does not distinguish the one from the other — it can only be their substantial forms that put them in different species. Likewise, if A and B are both immaterial substances, then there is no matter to enter into the picture at all, and once again it can only be their substantial forms that put them into different species. Again, if the one is a material substance and the other an immaterial substance, the material substance will have a substantial form that can be joined to matter, while the immaterial one will have a substantial form that cannot. These will obviously have to be distinct forms. There is perhaps a complication in the case of human souls, since they can be combined with matter when the human being is alive, and yet exist apart from matter after death. But, since human beings are the only things that have this special kind of substantial form, the point continues to hold. If A, say, is a human being and B belongs to a different species, then either B will be a material substance the substantial form of which cannot exist apart from matter, or else it will be an immaterial substance the substantial form of which cannot exist in matter. In either case, this will have to be a distinct substantial form from A's, which can do both. Q. E. D.

Thus, in the case where A and B belong to distinct species, it is the fact that their substantial forms are two different kinds of substantial forms that allows you to have two acts of existence and therefore two individuals.

- (2) But if the created individual substances A and B are in the same species, then things are different. In that case, of course, A and B have the same essence, and so the same substantial form. (Note: What kind of realism does this commit Aquinas to? We'll talk about that later.) On the general principle then that forms are what differentiate individuals, we must conclude that it is the accidental forms that differentiate individuals within the same species, since their substantial form is the same.

We have to be very careful now.

First of all, notice: Once again, we see the theory of differentiation by accidents that we saw as early as Porphyry and Boethius's *De trinitate* "Layer Cake" theory, and saw again in William of Champeaux' first theory.

But note also the following differences:

- (a) In Boethius's "Layer Cake" theory, although he was not fully explicit about it, it appeared to be the case that accidents not only

differentiated individuals from one another; they also were what made an individual the individual it is. In other words, for Boethius, it appeared that the unique combination of accidents an individual has not only serves as its principle of differentiation, but also as its principle of identification, in the sense in which we distinguished those two notions a while ago.

There was a problem about this, as we saw: It made substances dependent on accidents rather than the other way around, as it is supposed to be. This was an objection we ourselves raised against Boethius, and Abelard raised it again against William of Champeaux.

But Aquinas avoids this problem. For him, accidents differentiate, but they do not identify. The principle of identification for Aquinas is esse, not accidents. Accidents do not have that dual role for Aquinas. In short, while any creature is presumably going to have accidents, and while if any two creatures are in the same species their accidents will differentiate them from one another, nevertheless their accidents are not what makes those creatures the individuals they are; their esse's do that.

For example: As long as there are at least two human beings in existence, they are going to have to be distinguished from one another by some accidents or other. Since their essence is the same, it is only their accidents that allow you to have two acts of existing here, and so two individuals. But if all other human beings are destroyed, and there is only one human being remaining, that human being is going to be the individual it is no matter what accidents it has. Its identification, its identity, does not depend on accidents, although its differentiation from other individuals in the same species does.

- (b) There is another difference between Aquinas's theory and Boethius's. In Boethius's *De trinitate* perhaps — although not in the passages we looked at from his *Second Commentary on the De interpretatione* and the shorter passage from his *Second Commentary on Porphyry* in the *Notes and Texts* — the theory seemed to be that all accidents were involved in the differentiation of individuals, with the result that accidental change turned out to be impossible. All change was substantial change. At the time, we ourselves raised that as an objection to Boethius.

Aquinas, of course, is going to have none of that. As a good Aristotelian, he is going to be especially conscious of differences between accidental and substantial change (recall the *Warp and Woof* handout), and want to preserve that distinction.

So, for him, not all the accidents of a thing are relevant to differentiating it from other things in the same species.

The story is complicated, but in the end Aquinas thinks the only accidents that are involved are accidents that require matter. We will look at the role of matter in a moment. But, for the present, note that this gives us an important “theorem”:

Wherever there is a plurality of individuals in the same species,
they are all material.

As an immediate corollary of that “theorem” and the fact that Aquinas rejected the doctrine of universal hylomorphism — and in particular the theory that angels have a kind of “matter” too, a kind of “spiritual matter” — we get:

Angels come only one to a species.

Each angel exhausts a species, so that two angels are not only numerically distinct but distinct in kind. The archangels Gabriel and Michael, for instance, are as unlike one another as a lizard is from a dog. This was a characteristic Thomist thesis, one that came to be especially associated with him.

For immaterial substances, therefore, the distinction between species and individuals in effect collapses. You can say either that each angelic species has only one individual in it (“angels come only one to a species”), or that each angel is itself a species. There may be some small considerations that make the one locution preferable to the other for certain purposes, but at this level it’s basically all the same.

So, to summarize:

- (1) What is the principle of differentiation? There are two cases:
 - (a) The principle of interspecific differentiation is substantial form.
 - (b) The principle of intraspecific differentiation is a combination of accidents, and in particular, accidents that require matter. (For that reason, you might alternatively want to say the principle of intraspecific differentiation is matter. But that is not an especially good way to put it, since all the individuals in such a species will have matter. We’ll talk about matter in a moment.)

- (2) What is the principle of identification? Answer: esse.
- (3) What is the principle of individuality — that is, what makes something an individual? Well, to some extent that depends on how you interpret the question. You might say it is the having of an esse, since that is true of all individuals, and of nothing else. Or you might say it is matter, in the sense that it is only in the case of material things that we have individuals as distinct from species. You can decide for yourselves which of these you want to award the title “the principle of individuality.” As long as you are clear what is involved, the label doesn’t matter.

Now let’s talk about matter.

Why do you suppose Aquinas thought that whenever you have several individuals in the same species, they must be material individuals?

Well, I’m not sure I know the answer to that completely. But let’s go back and consider Boethius’s *De trinitate*, a passage we looked at once before, where Boethius talks about the role of place in differentiation (*Notes and Texts*, pp. 51–52, lines 83–88):

For three men are distinguished not by genus or species, but by their accidents. If by the mind we separate all their accidents from them, nevertheless place is diverse for each of them, and we can in no way suppose that it is one. For two bodies will not occupy one place, which is an accident. And therefore they are several in number, because they are made several by their accidents.

In short, for bodies at any rate (that is, material substances), diversity of place seems to be a necessary and sufficient condition for differentiating substances.

Aquinas seems to be thinking along roughly these lines too.

What makes Socrates distinct from Plato? It can’t be their substantial forms, because they have the same substantial form. On the other hand, **IN ONE SENSE** we have to say it isn’t accidental forms either. That is, we don’t want to think we are distinguishing here between one combination of the essence with a certain group of accidents and another combination of the same essence with a certain other group of accidents.

Now you may say: “Wait a minute! I thought that’s just what we were saying. Socrates and Plato differ in virtue of their accidents.” Well, that’s true: Accidents do the differentiating, but they have no part in the story of what it is we are differentiating here.

That would be to revert to the Boethian picture, and to give accidents not only a role in differentiating but also a role in identifying. That is, accidents may very well be part of the story of how Socrates gets to be differentiated from Plato, but they are no part of **WHAT** we are differentiating. Accidents are not for Aquinas what makes Socrates Socrates and what makes Plato Plato, even though they are what enables Socrates to be distinct from Plato, so that we can have both of them at the same time.

So what we are distinguishing here is not the essence plus certain accidents from the essence plus certain other accidents. What we are distinguishing is one occurrence of the essence (forget about the accidents) from another occurrence of the essence (forget about the accidents). Accidents are required in order for that to happen, but they are not part of what we are distinguishing.

In short, the essence, the very same essence, must be somehow repeatable.

How can that happen? Well, Aquinas seems to be thinking that this can only happen if the essence is repeated in distinct places. I don’t know of any very clear argument he gives for that conclusion, but that seems to be the idea.

It follows, therefore, that the only species that can have more than one individual in them are those that involve place — location. Now, in the Aristotelian tradition, things that occupy a place are bodies — that is, material objects. Therefore, the only species that can have more than one individual in them are species of material things.

This is why Aquinas sometimes talks as though the principle of intraspecific differentiation were matter. (We will see such a passage in a moment.)

Matter is required, as we have seen. It is a condition sine qua non. But, although you have to have it, it doesn’t really do anything to differentiate one individual from another within the same species. It’s the accidents that presuppose matter that do all the work.

Indeed, if you think about it, it’s easy to see that matter by itself couldn’t differentiate one individual from another within a species. All the individuals in that species will have matter — so that won’t serve to differentiate them.

And if you say, “Oh, it’s not just the having of matter by itself that differentiates one individual from another, it’s having this matter as opposed to having that matter” — now you aren’t talking about plain old matter any more. Now you’re

talking about matter that has already been divided up into this glob and that glob — that is, matter that has been spread out in space, and that occupies dimensions, which of course are accidents in the category of quantity.

This is what Aquinas is talking about when he talks about designated matter or signate matter. It's complicated business, and I have a handout on it (DISTRIBUTE "AQUINAS ON DESIGNATED (SIGNATE) MATTER.") It's ASSIGNED.

But now I want to move on to a new topic — and a new set of people.

Common Natures

In effect, this is just the problem of universals in Arab dress. As we shall see, the Arabs — and in particular Avicenna — provide a nice introduction to the problem of universals in the form it took in the later Middle Ages.

Reading Assignment:

On this topic, the best single secondary source available is:

Joseph Owens, "Common Nature: A Point of Comparison between Thomistic and Scotistic Metaphysics," *Mediaeval Studies* 19 (1957), pp. 1–14. A PDF copy may be found in the "Articles (Bibliography)" subfolder of our "Resources" page on Oncourse.

Notes and Texts, "Five Passages from Avicenna on Common Nature" (pp. 73–74), which goes along with Owens's paper. (This is just an English translation of passages Owens leaves in Latin in his own paper.)

As the title of Owens's paper suggests, he is writing mainly about Aquinas and Duns Scotus. But, as it turns out, both Aquinas and Duns Scotus have their point of origin in Avicenna. So we'll begin there.

Avicenna (980–1037)

Let's look first at Avicenna's *Logica* (to use the title it was known by in Latin), where he is worried about the notion of predication. And let's recall the way Abelard had set up the problem of universals. For him it was a question of "What is predicated of many?" If you say "things," then you are a realist; if you say "only words," then you are a nominalist.

When the question is framed in this way, Avicenna is going to turn out to be a realist. But he will be a realist with a difference. It is going to be much more

subtle than the rather straightforward realism of William of Champeaux's first theory, for example. Something new is happening with Avicenna.

Look first at "Five Passages" in the *Notes and Texts*, passage (1), p. 73. There Avicenna says that animal is in itself a certain something, but in itself it is neither singular nor universal. ('Singular' here is just the same as 'individual'. You say "singular" when you are speaking in an especially logical tone of voice rather than a metaphysical tone. That is, it is a piece of vocabulary that comes more from the medieval logical tradition than from the metaphysical tradition.)

Now think about the consequences of what I just said: that for Avicenna, animal in itself is neither singular nor universal. Insofar as 'singular' and 'universal' are meant to be opposites here, this begins to sound like perhaps a violation of the Law of Excluded Middle.

In fact, if you will recall back to my very first lecture in this course, I used a claim very much like this to construct an argument against realism. At that time I said that one objection against realism is that it violates the Law of Non-Contradiction insofar as it holds that animality — the very same animality — is both rational insofar as it is the animality of Socrates and non-rational insofar as it is the animality of Brownie the Ass. Abelard, of course, raised exactly the same objection against William of Champeaux's first theory of universals.

I also said, you will recall, that you might try to avoid this objection by claiming that it's not animality itself that is properly said to be rational or non-rational; it's animals — that is, individual animals, Socrates and Plato and Brownie. "The contradictory properties," I said, "do not belong to one and the same animal nature, but rather to several and distinct individual animals, so that there is no violation of the Law of Non-Contradiction at all."

But, I replied, that won't work. "Such a dodge may save you from violating the Law of Non-Contradiction. But, insofar as you have just committed yourself to saying that the one animal nature is neither rational nor non-rational, you now violate the Law of Excluded Middle."

At the time, I commented that this argument might strike you as fishy. Well, here it is again. Isn't Avicenna in effect doing the same thing? Animal by itself, he says, is neither universal nor singular. Only he doesn't view this as an objection. It's his own view.

How does it work? Well, let's look first at his arguments, and then try to figure out how his claim can be maintained.

Here is the argument in passage (1). Let's just look at it first, and consider objections to it in a moment.

- (a) Animal is not of itself universal. For if it were of itself universal, then it could never be predicated of singulars. Anything that is an animal would *a fortiori* be universal, insofar as animal is of itself universal. There could be no singular or individual animals.
- (b) On the other hand, animal is not of itself singular either. For if it were of itself singular, then it could not be predicated of many individuals. There would be only one animal.

This is a puzzling argument — both parts of it — but the basic strategy is clear. The strategy is to argue that the facts of predication — the fact that animal is predicated of singulars, and that it is predicated of several of them — require that, all by itself, animal be neither singular nor universal.

Passage (2) in the *Notes and Texts* then goes on to say that being singular or being universal are things that just happen to animal in itself — that is, they are accidents of animal in itself. (Latin *accidit* = "happen.")

If we look at passage (3), we can perhaps get some clarification. This is a passage not from Avicenna's *Logica*, but from a distinct work, his *Metaphysics*. And here he is talking not about animal but about horsehood (= *equinitas* = equinity). But the basic idea here seems to be the same as in the *Logica*, and I don't think there is anything to be made out of the fact that he uses a concrete noun ('animal') in the one case and an abstract noun ('horsehood') in the other. So, for the sake of uniformity, let's just put everything in terms of animal.

The idea then in passage (3) seems to be this:

Animal by itself has a certain definition.

Qualification: We don't want to take 'definition' in too strict a sense here. For the picture we are going to get is one we are also going to want to apply on up the Porphyrian tree, even at the level of substance — which is a category, and so does not have a strict definition in terms of genus + difference, because there is no higher genus.

Instead, when Avicenna here talks about "definition," I think we should read something like "intelligible content." We can, after all, form a perfectly good concept of substance by the Aristotelian process of abstraction (which is the context we ought to be thinking of here). In that sense, we can "understand" substance,

there is a perfectly good “intelligible content” there, even though we cannot define substance in the strict terms of genus + difference.

With that caveat, then, let’s go on.

Animal by itself, we said, has a certain definition or intelligible content. Now, what is true of animal by itself appears from passage (1) to be just exactly what is included in its definition or intelligible content — and presumably also whatever else is entailed by what is so included. (We want some kind of logical closure here.) That is what it means to say that such and such is true of animal in itself. No more and no less.

Generalizing, then, we can say that A in itself is B if and only if B is contained in or entailed by the definition or intelligible content of A. (Here ‘A’ and ‘B’ are to be replaced by general terms — we’re talking about the problem of universals, after all.)

In short, the idea is that A in itself is B if and only if the claim ‘A is B’ is an analytic truth. The notion of analyticity is a notoriously difficult one, but its clear enough for us to get a handle on what’s going on here.

OK, well what is the definition or intelligible content of animal? Here we do have available a definition in the strict sense of the word, namely: sensate, animate, corporeal substance. And that’s all. There is nothing said here about this sensate, animate, corporeal substance. And there is nothing said here about sensate, animate, corporeal substance that is predicated of many. In short, neither singularity nor universality is brought into the picture at all, one way or the other. Animal by itself is just indeterminate with respect to all that.

Now go back and think about Avicenna’s two-part argument in passage (1), the one that appeals to the “facts of predication.” In effect, what he is saying is that it is animal in the sense just described that is what is predicated. By itself, it includes neither singularity nor universality. Only such an indeterminate kind of thing, Avicenna argues, is capable of being predicated in all the required ways.

It is this indeterminate kind of thing that came to be called a common nature. (The actual term ‘common nature’ is apparently not in Avicenna, although he is certainly the source and fountainhead of this kind of talk.)

That’s passages (1)–(3). Now let’s pause to evaluate this, to head off two objections, and thereby perhaps to clarify what is going on here.

The first part of Avicenna's argument, you might say, is fine — that is, the part about universality. If animal all by itself were universal, then according to the way we have just learned to interpret that locution, this would mean that universality would be somehow built into the very definition or notion of animal. Part of what it is to be an animal, then, would be to be universal. Hence, anything that animal could be predicated of, universality could be predicated of it too, so that animal could never be predicated of individuals. This follows from a general principle that Aristotle formulated way back in the *Categories* 3 1^b10–11:

When one thing is predicated of another, all that which is predicable of the predicate will be predicable also of the subject.

In short, if animal were by itself universal, then 'universal' would have to be built into the very definition or notion of animal, and so could be truly predicated of animal, and therefore also truly predicable of anything of which animal was truly predicable, with the result that there could be no individual animals. And that's why animal by itself is NOT universal.

That much is fine. But (**OBJECTION (1)**) the other half of Avicenna's argument, you may say, is just a fallacy. If animal by itself is singular or individual, it does not by any means follow that animal cannot be predicated of many individuals, as Avicenna says it does follow. All that really follows it that every one of the many individuals of which animal can be predicated will be a singular. And that's hardly a problem — that's true!

In other words, if individuality or singularity is built into the definition or notion of animal then, on an analogy with the first half of the argument, all that follows is that anything of which animal can be truly predicated is an individual or singular. And that is hardly a problem; that's exactly what we want! It just means that the only real animals are individual animals.

So, while the first half of Avicenna's argument may go through, his attempted *reductio* in the second half just fails.

This is the first objection. It sounds persuasive at first, but in fact the situation is not so clear.

The objection assumes that when Avicenna is talking about whether animal in itself is singular or individual, he means merely a singular, an individual. But the objection fails, and Avicenna's argument works, if he means something stronger than that: being this individual — say, Socrates.

This distinction, of course, corresponds to a distinction I have drawn several times already, between various senses of the phrase 'principle of individuation' —

among others, what makes something an individual, as opposed to what makes it the individual it is.

If Avicenna is talking about being this individual — say, Socrates — then clearly his argument works. If being this individual, Socrates, is built into the very notion of animal, then animal cannot be truly predicated of anything but Socrates.

And in fact I think this probably is what Avicenna had in mind, so that in that sense the second half of his argument works as well as the first half.

But, you might still object, there is another sense of individuality or singularity, namely being AN individual, being A singular, and that in that sense there doesn't appear to be any reason at all for saying that singularity or individuality is not built into the very notion of animal. After all, all animals are individual animals.

But I think the objection still fails. That is, it turns out that, even if we keep clear about all the relevant distinctions, Avicenna still has an argument that neither being this individual — say, Socrates — nor even being AN individual can be built into the notion of animal. It's not an argument Avicenna actually gives, but it's certainly one that's available to him.

In other words, it's nice to be clear about these distinctions. But the result is not that Avicenna's position is weaker than he thought it was. It's rather that his position is stronger than we may have thought it was. But we'll have to wait a little to see how this goes.

Before we get to that, let's look at a second line of objection. This will lead us into the heart of Avicenna's theory.

Objection (2): Earlier, I said Avicenna is arguing that the facts of predication require that animal all by itself, with neither universality nor singularity built into it, is what is “predicated of many,” and that in fact only this kind of neutral common nature can be predicated of many.

But how can that be? If it's predicated of many, isn't it a universal in the sense we're talking about now, even though we just said it's not? I thought Aristotle had defined the universal in the sense we're now talking about as “what is predicated of many” (see *De interpretatione*, 7).

So how about it, Avicenna? You have an argument that the common nature in itself is not universal, and so is not predicated of many. And yet you say it the common nature in that sense that is predicated of many. Which is it? Is the common nature universal or not? Make up your mind!

Reply to Objection (2): Sure it's universal — no doubt about it. But it is not universal by itself. In other words, its being predicable of many is not something

built into the definition of the nature, and it doesn't follow from what is built into the definition either. But that doesn't mean that animal, for instance, is not predicable of many; it just means that it is not in itself predicable of many.

In order to understand this, we are going to have to look more closely.

For Avicenna, common natures can be found in two kinds of cases:

- (a) In singular things — that is, in particulars. This singular animal is indeed “this sensate, animate, corporeal substance.” Singularity or individuality does belong to the common nature insofar as it exists in singular things.
- (b) In the soul — that is, in concepts. This, of course, is just the Aristotelian theory according to which the nature of the external object is taken on by the mind of the knower. And in concepts, the common nature is abstracted from all singularity, all individuating and differentiating conditions. As a concept, therefore, the common nature is indeed universal.

Now the common nature by itself is neither singular nor universal. By itself it is just sensate, animate, corporeal substance, and whatever all that implies — but no more. The common nature animal, however, is singular — only not just in itself. That is something added on. It is singular in individual animals. Although animal all by itself does not include singularity, this animal does.

Likewise, the common nature animal is universal — only not just in itself. That is something added on. It is universal in concepts. Although animal all by itself does not include or entail universality, the concept “animal” does.

The common nature, therefore, is both singular and universal. And for that reason it cannot be in itself either one of these. If it were in itself one of these, that fact would prevent its ever being the other. So much for Objection (2).

Important: Once again, the notion of the common nature's in itself being such and such is basically the notion of something like analytic entailment. The phrase ‘in itself’ is thus doing duty for something like the expression ‘analytically’.

Reply to Objection (1): We are now in a position to see what was wrong with the first objection, against the second half of Avicenna's argument. The objection, you will recall, was in effect the observation that while animal in itself could not

be this singular or individual, there didn't seem to be anything wrong with its being in itself an individual or singular.

We now see what the problem with that is. If animal in itself were even an individual, then everything animal is predicated of would have to be an individual, with the result that animal could not exist in the mind in the form of an Aristotelian universal concept. The concept in the mind is not an individual. (It may be an individual concept, yes. But it's not an individual animal, which is what we are talking about here.)

In short, the real reason for the failure of that first objection is the fact that Avicenna accepts the Aristotelian theory that the knower takes on the form of the known.

Now let's move on.

Look at passage (4) from Avicenna (p. 74 in *Notes and Texts*), and text (3a) on the handout *Notes on Common Natures*. (Text (3a) is a passage I for some reason neglected to include in the *Notes and Texts*. **Note: I don't seem to have this handout any longer!**)

According to these passages, the question of unity or multiplicity simply cannot be sensibly asked about the common nature taken by itself. Recall, on the view of William of Champeaux's first theory and the view of Clarembald of Arras, the humanity of Socrates and the humanity of Plato are one humanity. On Boethius's view in the *Commentary on Porphyry*, William of Champeaux's second theory and Gilbert of Poitiers' view, they are two humanities.

In the present passages, Avicenna is saying that, if you ask about the humanity that is in Socrates — insofar as it is humanity, and not insofar as it is in Socrates — there is nothing to make it any different from Plato's. There is nothing singular about it. But neither is there anything in the notion of humanity that says it is one in Socrates and Plato. There is nothing universal about it either, taken in itself.

Hence the common nature in itself has no unity. This is not to say that it lacks unity, in the sense that it is a multiplicity or plurality. It doesn't have multiplicity or plurality either. The question of unity or multiplicity simply doesn't arise at that level. It arises when we talk about the common nature as existing either in singulars or in concepts. But then we are not talking about the common nature in itself any more.

Nevertheless, look at passage (5) of the Avicenna texts in the *Notes and Texts*, p. 74. Although common natures have no unity (or for that matter plurality) all by

themselves, they do have, he says, a kind of being even **all by themselves**. Although they exist only in individuals or in the mind, nevertheless they have some kind of being of their own. This is not the being of existence. That they do not have all by themselves. They only really exist insofar as they are in individuals, or alternatively, in the mind.

Rather this being that belongs to the common nature all by itself is a kind of lesser being — what came to be called *esse essentiae* or the being of an essence. (This terminology is not Avicenna's, but was used by later Scholastics who got the basic idea ultimately from Avicenna.) The idea is that the common nature is an entity in its own right. And while by itself animal is neither singular nor universal, it certainly is all by itself a different entity from the common nature stone, for instance. Each common nature has an integrity of its own, as a kind of metaphysical block — and that is what we call its lesser being. It has some “ontological status,” as it used to be fashionable to say; it is not absolutely nothing all by itself, even though it doesn't exist all by itself, either in singulars or in the mind.

So we have a curious state of affairs when we put all these passages together. Common natures have a kind of lesser being, but they have no unity at all. (This is not to say, of course, that they are multiple or plural.) All this, of course, is with respect to the common nature taken in itself.

Now what do you suppose happened when you took this doctrine and injected it into Latin philosophy, which was by now thoroughly Augustinian, and very conscious of the Augustinian equation of being with unity that I talked about when we were discussing Boethius? (This was pretty much accepted even by those Latin philosophers who were not otherwise especially Augustinian in their outlook — like Abelard. It was a kind of metaphysical axiom.)

Avicenna himself is not quite so clear about this equation of being and unity. In some places he seems to accept it, probably because it is to be found in Aristotle. But in the passages we are looking at now, he plainly does not accept it; here we have common natures that all by themselves have a kind of being but no unity whatever.

Apparently the equation of being with unity was not an especially important matter for Avicenna, since he equivocates on it. But it was an important matter for the Latins.

They could not tolerate Avicenna's doctrine here just as it stood: a lesser being but no unity at all. For them, being and unity went hand in hand. Hence, they could go one of two ways:

(a) They could take seriously Avicenna’s denial of unity to common natures in themselves, and conclude that common natures have no being in themselves either, not even a lesser being, contrary to what Avicenna said.

(b) Or they could take seriously Avicenna’s claim that common natures have a lesser being all by themselves, and conclude that therefore they have a lesser unity all by themselves too, despite Avicenna’s denial that they do. On this alternative, you would distinguish kinds or grades of unity to go with kinds or grades of being.

According to Owens in his paper “Common Nature,” Aquinas took the first road, Duns Scotus the second.

Hence:

	Convertibility	Degrees of Being	Degrees of Unity
Avicenna	X	OK	X
Aquinas	OK	X	X
Scotus	OK	OK	OK

Aquinas

Let’s look at Aquinas first. I am first going to present the interpretation of Aquinas that Owens gives, because it represents what has come to be a more or less standard — or at any rate common — interpretation (although probably less common now than it was when I was in graduate school). I think there are serious difficulties with this interpretation as a philosophical theory, and although it may be perfectly correct that Aquinas held it, I do not think he did. In fact, I think the more likely interpretation of Aquinas ends up making him look a lot more like Scotus — so that both Aquinas and Scotus took alternative (b) above, and it turns out to be Ockham who took alternative (a). But I will tell you about all that later. For the moment, let’s just set out the “Owens interpretation.”

For Aquinas, on Owens’s interpretation (I won’t bother adding that clause hereafter), the only kind of being a thing has is its act of existing, its esse or what

later would be called its esse existentiae. Aquinas has no room for Avicenna's lesser being.

In part, this is because of his theory of predication, Owens thinks. Aquinas does not think that true judgments in general correspond part by part with the world, in the simple minded way Fridugisus apparently did. But he does think this is so in some cases — for example, in the judgment 'Socrates is a man'. Just as the predicate 'man' is there bound to the subject 'Socrates' by the copula 'is', so too the judgment so formed is true because in reality the common nature man is bound into the individual Socrates by an esse, an act of existence. If the common nature already had its own esse by itself, Aquinas thinks (according to Owens), then this would prevent that kind of composition. It would get in the way.

Let's look a bit more closely at Aquinas on common natures. This discussion can be turned into a partial commentary on the notion of form in the very obscure Chapters 2 and 3 of *On Being and Essence* — still following Owens's interpretation.

For the fuller account, see my paper "Degrees of Being, Degrees of Goodness: Aquinas on Levels of Reality."

Aquinas in Chap. 2, § 12, pp. 43–44 of *On Being and Essence* (see also p. 31, n. 7) distinguishes what he calls the form of the part from the form of the whole. The form of the part is the same as the substantial form of a thing, without matter. (The omission of matter is what makes it partial; it is only part of the essence.) In man, for instance, the form of the part is the rational soul, which is the form of the body.

The form of the whole, on the other hand, is the whole essence, including both the substantial form and prime matter. In the case of a man, the form of the whole is man or humanity. It is a bit perverse, perhaps, to call this a "form," since it includes matter, but that is what Aquinas calls it. (See p. 2 of the handout "Common Natures.")

In an immaterial substance, of course, the distinction between the form of the part and the form of the whole vanishes. The substantial form just is the essence in that case. There is no matter involved.

Henceforth, we are concerned only with the form of the whole, the entire essence, Avicenna's common nature. I mentioned the form of the part only to set it aside.

Now recall the distinction between abstraction with precision and abstraction without precision from our discussion of Boethius.

The term 'body', we said, could be taken without precision, and in that sense we can say that Socrates is a body — a very special kind of body, to

be sure: an organic, rational, snub-nosed one, etc. But a body for all that. The term ‘body’ taken without precision doesn’t imply any of that extra stuff, but it doesn’t rule it out either; it’s just neutral about all that.

Or we can take the term ‘body’ with precision. And this time we do rule out all that extra stuff. In this sense, we can’t say Socrates is a body, but rather that Socrates has a body — plus all that other stuff (rationality, snub nose, etc.) added on separately, as extra.

When Boethius was talking about “abstraction” (or “division,” as he sometimes called it), he was talking about abstraction without precision.

Aquinas makes pretty much the same distinction. We can talk about the essence of something taken with precision. (See (1) on the handout.) Typically (although not always, as we just saw with ‘body’, which example comes from Aquinas himself), Aquinas uses the abstract form of the noun to express this notion: ‘humanity’ rather than ‘human’, ‘animality’ rather than ‘animal’. This is what Aquinas calls the essence CONSIDERED AS A PART. (Note: This means we have the “form of the whole considered as a part.” Be careful with the terminology.)

When we are talking this way, we are talking about what is contained in the definition of that essence (and what is entailed by that), but nothing more. Anything more has to be mentioned separately, as an add-on. Thus, Socrates is not a humanity; Socrates has a humanity, plus a snub nose, and bunch of other things. Therefore, humanity is a part of Socrates.

Aquinas acknowledges that the essence can also be taken without precision, what he calls the essence (the “form of the whole”) “CONSIDERED AS A WHOLE.” ((2) on the handout.) Here we use the concrete form of the noun: ‘man’ rather than ‘humanity’, ‘animal’ rather than ‘animality’. In this case, the other ingredients of Socrates (or whatever we’re talking about) are not implied, but they’re not ruled out either.

So far, this all looks fairly familiar. But Aquinas isn’t done yet. He goes on to say that the essence considered as a WHOLE in this way can be further considered absolutely or else insofar as it has being (*esse*) — either being in this or that individual, or else being in the mind as a concept. (Aquinas too accepts the Aristotelian theory that the mind take on the form or essence of the known.)

Considered absolutely ((2a) on the handout), the essence without precision is sometimes (when it occurs in subject position) expressed by phrases like “animal as such” or “man *qua* man.” Whether we use a locution like that or not in any given case, we mean to include whatever is implied by the notion of the essence, to exclude (rule out) whatever is incompatible with that notion, and to be completely neutral about all the rest.

Considered insofar as it has being in this or that individual or in the mind as a concept, we mean to include all the rest — whatever is built into the individual, or whatever is built into the concept in the mind. (See (2bi) and (2bii) on the handout.) (It's a little hard to see how the two forms of (2b) continue to be "abstracted" at all, with or without precision, but that's what Aquinas says.)

For Aquinas, (1) — the essence or "form of the whole" considered as a part — has no being. The term 'humanity', for instance, is simply a non-denoting term. It prescinds from — that is, excludes — everything that is not included in the notion of "man." But that of course means it prescinds from or excludes esse, which is "included" only in the notion or essence of God. (Avicenna would of course say it prescinds only from the esse that is accidental to it, not from its own lesser being, but — on Owens's interpretation — Aquinas is not buying any of that.) Since esse is positively excluded, of course humanity cannot exist.

Humanity, then, does not exist for Aquinas. What does exist is the composite of humanity plus an esse. But that composite is not an existing humanity; it's an existing individual — for instance, the composite Socrates.

(This commits us to the perhaps odd view that an existing whole has non-existing ingredients or "parts" — and indeed, non-existing essential parts. For Aquinas, at least for Owens, you cannot weasel out of the oddity of this by allowing that while this "part" — the nature — doesn't really exist, nevertheless it's still out there, with at least some minimal kind of lesser reality. Many people will find this consequence too much to take. But it's not a philosophically incoherent view, just unusual — and ought to be thought about very carefully.)

Furthermore, given some funny business with Aquinas's theory of predication, I think it follows that for him, (1) in the handout — that is, the form of the whole considered as a part — is not what is predicated, contrary to what I take to be Avicenna's view. In order to be predicated at all on Aquinas's theory, the common nature must be taken in a way that doesn't positively exclude esse. Hence, we need some form of (2) on the handout. In order to be predicated of many, it must not include this or that esse, either in individuals or in the mind. That would preclude its being predicated of anything else. Hence, for Aquinas, only (2a) remains. Only that is what is predicated of many.

Putting it another way, (1) cannot be predicated of many because it excludes too much. (2b), in either of its alternatives, cannot be predicated of many because it includes too much. (2a), however is "just right," and it is that that is predicated of many.

Now, so far we have the common nature or essence considered in these various ways, and in some cases expressed by special terminology to reflect these various ways of conceiving it. What we want to know now is what these various ways of conceiving or considering the common nature have to do with ontology, with what is really in the world. In other words, what does all this “conceiving” and “considering” talk have to do with the metaphysics of the situation?

In each case — (1), (2a), and (2b) in both alternatives — our way of considering the common nature is a correct representation of what is going on, in the sense that we are not including anything that isn’t there. (Our consideration is not “false and empty,” to use Boethius’s phrase.) But under what circumstances is our way of conceiving the common nature an exact representation of what is going on? When have we accommodated everything? In short, according to which of the above divisions and subdivisions does a common nature exist in exactly the way we consider it?

Obviously, the answer is: only (2b-i) and (2b-ii). The common nature taken as in (1) does not exist, as we have already seen, since it excludes *esse* outright. Similarly, the common nature taken as in (2a) does not exist just like that, since — just like that — it takes no account of *esse* at all. Taken absolutely, it is too indeterminate to exist just as it is conceived.

Let’s put this another way. For Aquinas, there is a being (in the participial sense — something that exists) that answers to the term ‘the man Socrates’, and another being that answers to the term ‘the concept man’. But there is no being that answers to the term ‘humanity’ (or even to the term ‘the humanity of Socrates’), although there are beings of which humanity is a constituent part. And there is no being answering to the term ‘man’ taken absolutely, or as we sometimes put it, to ‘man *qua* man’.

Therefore, what is predicated of many — (2a) — has no being in reality. There is none of this “lesser being” stuff that Avicenna talks about. Neither does what is predicated of many have any unity of its own. Aquinas agrees with Avicenna here.

Let’s go back to the “plucked chicken” experiment we have performed several times before. Pull the accidents off Socrates and Plato, until you get down to the common nature. How many do you have left? William of Champeaux’s first theory and Clarembald of Arras say: One. Boethius’s theory in the *Commentary on Porphyry*, William of Champeaux’s second theory and Gilbert of Poitiers all say: Two. Avicenna says that you indeed have a common nature left, and it has its

own proper being, but the question how many you have is simply inapplicable when you frame the question this way.

What is Aquinas's answer? **ZERO!**

Although you can talk about doing this kind of thing, what you end up with verbally or conceptually is just the common nature taken either according to **(1)** or according to **(2a)**. And nothing answers to those.

On this interpretation of Aquinas's theory of common natures, there are two mistakes to avoid:

- (i) Common natures do not exist.

That's wrong. They do exist, for Aquinas. They exist in individuals and they exist in the mind. But they do not exist in abstraction with precision or in abstraction without precision and absolutely — that is, according to **(1)** or **(2a)**. They derive no being at all from themselves.

- (ii) Since sameness and difference do not pertain to the nature taken in abstraction without precision and absolutely — that is, to **(2a)** — or for that matter taken with precision — that is, **(1)** — therefore the common nature man in Socrates and the common nature man in Plato are not diverse and are not the same. They are neither the one nor the other, but rather some kind of indeterminate third something in between.

That is wrong too. They are diverse. The nature in Socrates is all tied up with Socrates's matter, with Socrates's differentiating accidents and with his esse. The one in Plato is all tied up with Plato's. They are quite diverse. They are just not diverse (or, for that matter, the same) considered just insofar as it is the nature — that is, considered in abstraction without precision and absolutely. It is diverse in diverse things — which is to say, not taken absolutely or with precision.

Evaluation of Owens's Interpretation

Well, that is Owens's interpretation of Aquinas — or rather my way of putting that interpretation. It is a very influential interpretation, any many people have accepted it — both as the correct interpretation and as the correct theory in its own right. And, it must be said, there is some pretty strong textual support for this interpretation.

Nevertheless, I think there are some insuperable objections to it. This is not to say that Aquinas didn't really hold the theory (although I don't think he did). But if he did hold it, he shouldn't have held it.

What is the problem? Well, I think there are two problems. They are distinct, but closely related.

- (a) First, how on earth is theory ever going to account for the community — the “commonness” — of the common nature? For Aquinas, if the interpretation sketched above is correct, the nature taken in abstraction without precision and absolutely — that is, (2a) above — is (because of Owens's account of Aquinas's theory of predication) what is predicated of, and so is somehow metaphysically in, Socrates and Plato, and for that matter also in the mind. On the other hand, on this same interpretation, there is nothing answering to the nature so taken, as we have just seen. Nothing at all! So it looks as if Aquinas is heading straight for nominalism. There is nothing out there that is really common, and nothing out there that is really predicated of many either. (That is or course not yet an objection. It's just to observe that this interpretation commits Aquinas to nominalism. But it will be the basis for an objection, as we shall see.)
- (b) There is an altogether similar problem with the Aristotelian theory of knowledge, which Aquinas by and large accepts. (He accept enough of it to give us this problem.) If the nature in the mind is not somehow the same as that in the thing, then how do I ground the objectivity of knowledge? I thought the whole point of this Aristotelian approach to knowledge was to say they are the same, and that no inference was needed from the one to the other.

On Owens's interpretation, Aquinas turns out to be unable to make up his mind. Sometimes he sounds like a nominalist, sometimes like a realist. If you stress the claim that knowledge and common predication are grounded in the common nature, then he looks like a realist. But if you stress the fact that the common nature, taken in the only sense in which it can do these things, doesn't exist, then he certainly sounds like a nominalist.

You see, on this interpretation, although Aquinas doesn't want to grant any reality at all to the common nature in the relevant sense, he nevertheless wants it to do work for him. He refuses to give it any metaphysical rights, but yet he demands that it take on epistemological and predication duties. It is supposed to ground the objectivity of knowledge; it is supposed to be the justification for the fact that we predicate the same term 'man' non-arbitrarily of Socrates and Plato. These are not trivial tasks. And yet we are supposed to entrust them to a complete non-entity?

The Principle of Philosophical Fair Play

Let me introduce you here to a kind of basic philosophical principle that Aquinas appears to be violating. I call it the Principle of Philosophical Fair Play.

The basic idea here is that if, in your philosophical thinking, you appeal to something to do a certain theoretical task for you, then it is only "fair" to grant that something some kind of "ontological status" (as they used to say) in your theory. After all, if it is not even there, it can hardly do any serious work, solve any philosophical problems for you.

So the basic idea is: No pay, no work.

I described this as a "a kind of basic philosophical principle." **That doesn't mean it's certainly true**, but it is at least initially compelling if you approach things in a certain way. And it's the kind of thing philosophers have to take a stand on — whether to accept it or to reject it.

For instance, consider thoughts. Thoughts perhaps appear to be distinguished from one another by what they are about, by their objects. (I do not mean to be committing myself to this view; I am just using it to illustrate a point.)

Now thinking about a golden mountain is different from thinking about a round square or thinking about the present king of France. Hence those thoughts, presumably, are distinguished by their objects. And yet those objects — golden mountains, round squares, present kings of France — do not exist.

In such cases, many philosophers — for instance, Alexius Meinong and Hector-Neri Castañeda — have felt the Principle of Philosophical Fair Play to be so compelling that they had to grant a certain kind of ontological reality to golden mountains and round squares and present kings of France. These things do not exist, of course, but they must have some kind of reality — or else they could not do their job of distinguishing those thoughts from one another.

So, if we follow this line of reasoning, we begin to make distinctions among kinds of reality. Some things have full-blown existence. Others have a lesser reality — call it Meinongian “subsistence” or whatever. But everything you are ever going to appeal to in your philosophy ends up being awarded some degree of reality or other. For if it’s not out there in some sense, it can hardly do any work for you. No pay, no work. That’s the Principle of Philosophical Fair Play.

On the other hand, other philosophers have not found this so called “Principle” to be all that compelling. They have been willing to deny it, and to say that thoughts, for example, are distinguished by their objects — even though those objects might have no reality at all.

Edmund Husserl held this, at least in his early period (for example, in his *Logical Investigations*), and Reinhardt Grossmann holds it still today, unless I misunderstand him.

Now you may or may not find the idea of appealing in this way to complete non-entities to do philosophical work for you to be an abhorrent idea — very strange indeed. But of course your feelings of abhorrence don’t count as legitimate philosophical arguments. So the Principle of Philosophical Fair Play seems to me to be an open question.

Nevertheless, what is not an open question, what is certain is that there are certain cases where we have to make a choice: either to deny the Principle, or to start distinguishing degrees and levels of reality.

Thinking about non-existent objects is one such situation. And Aquinas has now found himself in another such situation: What are we going to do about the common nature taken absolutely — about man as such, man qua man?

Aquinas appeals to this notion in his account of predication and in his theory of knowledge. Hence he is either going to have to grant it some degree of reality, or else he is going to have to deny the Principle of Philosophical Fair Play.

Which does he do? Well, as Owens interprets him, Aquinas denies the Principle. He refuses to allow degrees of reality. For Aquinas, being is being — and that’s all there is to it. It doesn’t come in levels or degrees. The common nature taken absolutely has no being of its own. The only being it has is the esse or existence of the individuals in which it is found, or else the esse or existence of a concept in the mind.

There is certainly textual support for Owens’s interpretation. To pick just one passage, consider *On Being and Essence*, Chap. 3, § 4, p. 47:

So it is clear that the nature of man, considered absolutely, abstracts from every being (= *esse*), but in such a way that it prescinds from no one of them. (*Emphasis added.*)

And there are other texts that can be likewise read as supposing Owens's interpretation, although this is probably the most explicit of them.

Nevertheless, if that is Aquinas's view, he has got himself into a hopeless fix. Although he here seems to be explicitly saying what Owens says he says, it nevertheless appears that other features of his doctrine commit him to a kind of being for the nature taken absolutely. That is, the particular kinds of jobs Aquinas is asking the common nature taken absolutely to do for him are jobs that, on his own grounds, cannot be done without granting them some kind of being of their own.

What are these jobs? They are unifying jobs. Think of the problems I raised a moment ago. The common nature in Socrates and the common nature in Plato must somehow be the same nature, or else there is no real basis saying the same nature is predicated of both. What is it, then, that is the same in both Socrates and Plato? On the grounds we have seen already, it can only be the nature taken as a whole and absolutely — that is, in sense **(2a)**. On the other hand, to say it is the same is just to say it is one. (Aquinas explicitly accepts the identification of sameness with unity in many texts.) And to say it is one is just to say that it does have being after all, on the basis of the Augustinian identification of being with unity, AROUND WHICH OWENS BUILT HIS ENTIRE PAPER!

In other words, to say that the same one common nature in sense **(2a)** is what is predicated of many, and then to say that this same one common nature has no being at all, is to deny the Augustinian equation of being and unity, not to uphold it in the face of Avicenna's theory, as Owens makes it out to be. And since I think there is incontrovertible evidence that Aquinas adhered to the Augustinian equation, I also think there is good evidence that either Owens's interpretation of Aquinas's theory is wrong, or else Aquinas himself has a hopelessly inconsistent theory.

The same thing can be said with respect to the second problem I raised earlier. If there is no sense whatever in which we can say that the common nature that exists mentally in cognition and the common nature that exists externally in Socrates and Plato is the same one common nature, then the entire Aristotelian account of knowledge collapses, and with it the Aristotelian guarantee of the objectivity of our knowledge. That account depended crucially on our being able to say there is no inference needed to be sure that our concepts match reality, since our concepts are formally identical with (= the same as = one with) the realities out there. But

if we say they are the same, then we are committed, on the basis of the Augustinian equation, to saying they have some degree of being too, contrary to Owens's interpretation of the theory.

Notice that it does no good to say that, yes, the common nature does have being; it has one (mental) being in the mind, and another being in Socrates, and yet a third being in Plato. Now we have three beings, and so three unities. And none of them is what we want. Each of them is confined to its own little realm, to the mind, or to Socrates or to Plato, and none of them is common. Hence none of them is available to take on the duties Aquinas requires. The only way to do that is to give the nature in sense (2a) a unity of its own, and therefore (by convertibility) a being of its own too. If Aquinas were really denying all unity and all being to natures considered absolutely, he would have to abandon the Aristotelian theory of knowledge and have to say there is nothing (besides words) that is predicated of many. But Aquinas doesn't do that, although William of Ockham, in the early fourteenth century, will.

And that is why I think Owens's interpretation, while it may or may not be a good interpretation of Aquinas, is certainly a bad theory.

John Duns Scotus

Let's now see what John Duns Scotus has to say about all this.

Scotus lived from around 1265 to 1308. He therefore died when he was roughly 43. In my judgment, Scotus was one of the best philosophers who ever lived.

Note: We do not have a text from Scotus in our Readings on the topic of common natures. The text that is in the Readings is devoted more to the notion of individuation.

For Avicenna, recall, common natures in themselves have no unity whatever. But they do have a lesser degree of being. For Aquinas, on Owens's interpretation, they have no unity or being either one, not even in a "lesser" degree; as we've just seen, I'm not so sure about this interpretation of Aquinas. For Scotus, they have both a lesser being and also a lesser unity.

Avicenna had already distinguished kinds or degrees of being, but not of unity. The latter is Scotus's contribution. And it is an important contribution indeed.

For Scotus, natures are always **(1)** individuated when they exist in real things out there in reality. We can also **(2)** conceive a nature universally, in the mind. So far, this sounds just like Aquinas. But **(3)** between these two conditions, there is for Scotus the nature just in itself. And it is in his doctrine here that Scotus differs from Aquinas, at least according to the Owens interpretation of Aquinas. (On my own view, the two are somewhat closer to one another than Owens has them.)

Scotus seldom uses the term ‘common natures’. He simply speaks of ‘natures’. Sometimes he also calls them ‘formalities’, or just ‘realities’. But he never calls them “things” (res). For Scotus, a res is always an individual. This means that ‘thing’ is a reserved term in Scotus’s philosophical vocabulary, so one has to be careful not to speak loosely when talking about Scotus’s views.

Natures are indifferent in themselves to esse or existence, just as they are for Avicenna and Aquinas. They are a kind of “neutral essence.” Yet they have their own being, a kind of esse quidditativum, a “quidditative being” (quiddity = whatness = that which is the answer to the question “What is it?” = the essence), or “essential being.” This too is just as in Avicenna, although it is contrary to Owens’s interpretation of Aquinas.

In addition to having their own kind of being, for Scotus natures just in themselves have a kind of unity of their own too, contrary both to Avicenna and to Owens’s interpretation of Aquinas. The nature stone has a kind of unity of its own, and the nature man also has a unity of its own. And the two are in some sense distinct from one another. We can say all this, Scotus thinks, without ever considering the question of existence. But we could not do this if they did not have some unity and being of their own.

(DISTRIBUTE HANDOUT “DUNS SCOTUS: KINDS OF UNITY AND DISTINCTION.”)

Now look at the top of the handout “Duns Scotus on Kinds of Unity and Distinction.” For Scotus, there are three “levels” (so to speak) at which natures or essences may be considered: **(a)** the level of the individual (res), **(b)** the level of the concept, and **(c)** the level of the nature or formality just in itself, which can actually be found only in individuals or concepts. For each of these levels, there is a kind of unity (= sameness, identity) and correspondingly a kind of diversity or distinction. This is a rather sticky but very important part of Scotus’s doctrine. It is sticky because it is not altogether clear exactly how to define these various notions. And Scotus seems to have changed his mind on some of them over the course of his career.

On all this, see Marilyn McCord Adams, “Ockham on Identity and Distinction,” *Franciscan Studies* 36 (1976), 5–74, and also her *William Ockham*, vol. 1, Ch. 2,

on “physical” reserve in the Wells Library. Both of these sources talk about Scotus as well as Ockham. But I have lots of questions about Adams’s analysis.

Roughly, here’s how it goes:

- (1) At the level of the individual or thing (= res), the unity involved is called numerical unity. Socrates is numerically one. This is the kind of unity an individual thing has. Thus, Socrates is “numerically one,” and Cicero and Tully are “numerically the same” or “numerically one” or “numerically identical.”

The distinction that goes with this level of reality is called the real distinction. It is found whenever you have numerically more than one thing. Sometimes the expression ‘numerical distinction’ is found instead of ‘real distinction’, but the latter is the more usual term.

Scotus nowhere that I know of gives us a very clear account of just what he means by numerical unity or real distinction. But William of Ockham, in the intellectual generation immediately after Scotus, in effect takes the Indiscernibility of Identicals as the main criterion of numerical unity, and correspondingly the failure of indiscernibility as the main criterion of the real distinction. In other words,

Two individuals (NB) A and B are numerically identical if and only if everything that is true to say of A is also true to say of B and vice versa, and they are really distinct otherwise.

And, although one should be cautious, it is probably safe to view Scotus as having basically the same thing in mind.

But there is more to the story. The notion of real distinction is often tied up throughout this period with the notion of separability, at least if we are talking about creatures. ‘Separability’ here means it is possible to have one without the other. It doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with spatial separation.

I have to add the clause about “creatures” because at this time everyone agreed, as a result of a certain formulation of one of the ecumenical councils, that the three persons of the Trinity are all really distinct from one another. Yet since God is supposed to be necessarily a Trinity of persons, there is no question of having one person without the other here.

Thus, provided A and B are not both persons of the Trinity, we can say (where, as before, A and B are individuals):

A is really distinct from B if and only if it is possible for A to exist without B, OR ELSE possible for B to exist without A (or perhaps both).

Furthermore, if A and B are creatures, and are not causally related (and I don't just mean efficient causality) to the extent that one depends causally on the other, then we can say something stronger:

A is really distinct from B if and only if it is possible for either to exist without the other. (That is, it goes both ways.)

The word 'possible' here refers not to natural possibility — like the so called "laws of nature" — but to the broadest kind of logical possibility. This notion of logical possibility is to be cashed out for Scotus in terms of God's power. To say God is omnipotent is just to say he can do anything that is logically possible. Or, to turn it around, the notion of logical possibility is grounded metaphysically in God's power. (This, incidentally, is a very rich metaphysical claim, that possibility is general is metaphysically grounded in the powers of things, and that logical possibility in particular, the broadest kind of possibility, is metaphysically grounded in the powers of God.)

Thus, Socrates and Plato are really distinct, since it is possible for either one to exist without the other. Likewise, God and creatures are really distinct, since while (because creatures causally depend on God) it is not possible to have creatures without God, it is possible to have God without creatures.

Likewise, an individual substance is really distinct from at least its separable accidents. Not only can you have the substance without the accidents. You can also have the accidents without the substance, Scotus thinks — at least by the power of God. This would be a miracle, in the sense that it goes beyond the normal laws of nature; but it would not be a logical impossibility. In fact, many people thought this is exactly what happens in the case of the Eucharist: the accidents of bread and wine are preserved, even though their underlying substance has been annihilated. (The accidents certainly don't inhere in the body and blood of Christ. The body of Christ is not round and flat.)

Although these claims about separability seem to be true on Scotus's theory, I suspect his actual notion of numerical identity and real distinction is based on the Indiscernibility of Identicals, as we discussed a moment ago.

- (2) At the level of concepts, the unity that is appropriate is the kind of unity the concept of man, for instance, has as one concept. Scotus has no special term for this kind of unity, and as far as I can tell, he never really talks about it very much.

The corresponding kind of distinction is called the distinction of reason. This is a very low-grade distinction, and is not on the whole especially important in Scotus's philosophy.

The criterion for a distinction of reason is this:

A and B are distinct by a distinction of reason if and only if the concept of A and the concept of B are two concepts for the same item.

Notice that I use the neutral phrase "the same item," and not "the same thing (= res). This is because, for Scotus, the notion of a distinction of reason applies also at the level of natures. Thus, at the level of individuals, Aristotle and the teacher of Alexander the Great are distinct by a mere distinction of reason, since although the concept of Aristotle and the concept of the teacher of Alexander the Great are two distinct concepts, nevertheless the actual person who is Aristotle and the actual person who is the teacher of Alexander the Great are numerically the same person. (Note: This means that a distinction of reason is perfectly compatible with numerical identity.) But the distinction of reason applies also at the level natures. For example, man and rational animal are distinct by a mere distinction of reason, since although the nature man and the nature rational animal are one and the same nature, nevertheless those two terms express two distinct concepts. (The concept "rational animal" is a complex concept with at least two ingredients, whereas the concept "man" is presumably not.)

Scotus has very little to say about the notions of identity and distinction at this level, so I am not altogether clear about either the criterion I have given or the examples. As far as I can tell, this whole level is not very important for Scotus's theory.

Now comes the hard part:

- (3) Between levels (1) and (2), there is the level of the nature or formality. Here is where Scotus makes his biggest contribution. The unity that goes at this level is called a real less than numerical unity or real minor unity. ('Minor' is

just Latin for “less.”) This unity is real — that is, it is not just a product of our minds, not just something we make up. It is grounded in reality, on the side of reality, *ex parte rei*. And yet it is less than numerical — that is, it does not amount to singularity. If the kind of unity the nature man has all by itself were numerical unity, then the nature by itself would be an individual. And, as Avicenna has already shown us, that isn’t so.

The distinction appropriate to this level is the celebrated formal distinction.

Adams suggests a criterion for the formal distinction (“Ockham on Identity and Distinction,” p. 35; *William Ockham*, Vol. 1, pp. 24–25). Basically, it goes like this (I am paraphrasing drastically, but I don’t think I’m distorting):

A and B are formally distinct if and only if (1) they are either numerically the same thing, or else are metaphysical ingredients of (constituents of, accidents of, etc.) what is numerically the same thing, and (2) neither one is analytically contained in the other.

I think there are lots of problems with this cobbled-together definition, so don’t take this as the final criterion. But let’s not stop over them now. Instead, let’s back up and look at what this and other such definitions are trying to capture.

Basically, the formal distinction is a distinction that applies not at the order of individuals — that is, not in the order of actually existing things. In other words, the formal distinction is not the real distinction, in the technical sense in we have just talked about the real distinction. It is, of course, “real” in the looser sense that it is “on the side of reality” — it is not something we just make up, a distinction merely in our point of view. For this reason, the formal distinction is not the same as the mere distinction of reason either. Rather, it is a distinction that has some real metaphysical basis, but belongs to the order of essence or nature all by itself.

Since essences are what is conceived, the formal distinction between one essence and another can be put in conceptual terms — or, as I have paraphrased it a moment ago, in terms of analyticity. (Can you conceive of A without conceiving of B or vice versa?) At the same time, since essences or natures have their own kind of quidditative being for Scotus, the formal distinction is on the side of reality. It has a basis in the real world, and is not just a matter of concepts.

Let me emphasize once again that this distinction among essences or natures is not called a real distinction, even though it does have a real basis. The term ‘real

distinction’ is reserved for something else, as we have seen. On the other hand, the less than numerical unity that belongs at this level of essences or natures is called a “real unity.” This is because the opposite of the real distinction is not called “real” unity, but rather “numerical” unity. So the term ‘real unity’ is not already spoken for, and is free to be used here.

(Once again, consult the table at the top of the handout “Duns Scotus: Kinds of Unity and Distinction.”)

Part of the difficulty in defining the formal distinction in Scotus (and for that matter in defining the real distinction) is in coming up with a good, reliable list of what and what is not supposed to be formally (or really) distinct from what else. Scotus discusses this in several places, but the upshot is not as clear as one would like it.

In this messy situation, perhaps the best thing to do is to back up and ask what the formal distinction is supposed to do. Why does Scotus want any such distinction to begin with?

Let us start from the other end, with the notion of real less than numerical unity. The idea there seems to be this:

Consider two individuals, Socrates and Brownie the Ass. They have many things in common — common natures. For example, both are animals. On the other hand, there are other things they do not share. Socrates, for example, is a rational animal, whereas Brownie is an irrational animal. In other words, animality is rational (or combined with rationality, if you prefer) in Socrates, and is not in Brownie the Ass.

Now there is a sense in which the animality in Socrates and the animality in Brownie the Ass are one and the same animality. The nature is a common nature, after all, and so is present wholly and entirely in both of them. It follows, therefore, that this one and the same animality is both rational (or combined with rationality, if you prefer) and not rational (not so combined). And that is a contradiction.

As we have seen already with Abelard, it does no good to say here that animality is rational insofar as it is in Socrates and not rational insofar as it is Brownie. All that is true enough, but it does no good if we think we are going to avoid the contradiction that way. It would only avoid the contradiction if we took these “insofar as” considerations to mean that the animality in Socrates and the animality in Brownie are not the same animality after all, whereas (as we have just seen) we want to find some way of saying that are the same animality.

Here, therefore, we have an entity that is in some sense one and the same and yet we can say contradictory things about it.

Now go back and recall our definitions of numerical unity or identity and the real distinction. There we said that the criterion of numerical unity is the Indiscernibility of Identicals. But here we have a case where we have one entity, the animality that is in some sense the same in Socrates and in Brownie the Ass, and yet it violates the Indiscernibility of Identicals, since it is both rational and not rational.

Hence, we conclude, the unity that this one animality has is not numerical unity, but rather another kind of unity. It is real — it is not just a fiction we make up — but it is less than numerical, since it fails the test of numerical unity.

Well, what is the criterion for this real less than numerical unity? (I've already given you the criterion for the corresponding distinction: the formal distinction.) On the criterion of numerical unity, Scotus says different things in different places (see Adams, *William Ockham*, Vol. 1, pp. 24–25). But it always seems to have something to do with the notion of analyticity. Thus, if A and B are common natures, then A is identical with B by a real less than numerical unity (this is sometimes called formal identity) just in case the one is analytically contained in the other, or (in other texts of Scotus) just in case the two are analytically equivalent — for example, man and rational animal. This, of course, is the delicate part that takes the most careful working out.

Scotus also adds the proviso that A and B have to be found together in the case of numerically one individual. But this addition seems to be to be unnecessary, since if the one is analytically contained in the other, then in whatever individual the containing nature is found, the contained one will be found too. Thus the additional proviso appears to be satisfied automatically. (There may be a problem if you want to worry about natures that do not exist in any individual, but let's just ignore that for now.)

Now once we have this notion of real less than numerical unity, we need a notion of the corresponding kind of distinction or diversity, which we call the formal distinction. As I said, I've already given you this. Scotus in effect seems to say simply that if A and B are natures, then they are formally distinct just in case the kind of analytic containment fails that would be required for them to be one with the kind of real less than numerical unity we just described. Of course, all the ambiguity in the notion of analytic containment involved in formal unity is just inherited now by the notion of formal distinction.

Once again, Scotus adds the requirement that A and B are found together in the case of numerically one individual. This time the proviso is not idle, of course,

and although I do not see any compelling reason to add it, there is no special reason not to either. It just means that, for whatever reason, Scotus wants to reserve the term ‘formal distinction’ for natures that are in fact sometimes found together. Thus with this proviso, humanity and asininity would not count as formally distinct. On the other hand, the two are plainly distinct in a way that is not a mere distinction of reason, since there is a real metaphysical basis for the distinction. And the distinction between them is not the real distinction either, since the criterion of a real distinction is just the failure of indiscernibility for the kinds of entities we say are identical only when they satisfy indiscernibility. But, as we saw a moment ago, we talk about one and the same identical nature even where indiscernibility is violated. (In short, real distinction applies at the level of individuals, not of natures.) So perhaps in a broader sense of the term — one that does not require that the natures be found together in numerically one individual — humanity and asininity would count as formally distinct after all. Either that or else we’re going to have to allow yet another kind of distinction to account for such cases..

Let us give some examples:

- (1) Socrates’s humanity and his weight are formally distinct. Neither one is analytically contained in the other. (On the other hand, Socrates and his weight are really distinct, since — at least by the power of God — either one might exist without the other.)
- (2) Socrates’s humanity and his animality may count as formally distinct, depending on how we interpret the kind of analytic containment involved in real minor unity. (If real minor unity requires that A and B each be analytically contained in the other, then of course humanity and animality fail that requirement, so that they count as formally distinct. But if we require only one-way analytic containment for formal unity, then they will be identical by a real minor unity.)
- (3) God’s will and his intellect are formally distinct. So too are his divine goodness and divine wisdom. For all the ambiguity in Scotus’s theory of formal identity and distinction, he is quite clear on these claims.

Indeed, there is a lot of evidence that the notion of the formal distinction first arose not as a result of the kinds of general metaphysical speculations we have just been engaging in, but rather as the result of quite particular theological

considerations like this. In short, it is likely that the whole notion of the formal distinction was originally a theological theory that only later came to be applied to purely philosophical matters.

In fact, it was because of theological considerations that Scotus came to revise his notion of the formal distinction. On this, see Adams, “Ockham on Identity and Distinction,” pp. 37–43; Adams, *William Ockham*, Vol. 1, pp. 26–29; and Hester Gelber’s Ph.D. dissertation, *Logic and the Trinity* — on reserve in the Wells Library. (See the handout on “Reserves.”)

Apparently, people criticized Scotus’s notion of the formal distinction, as we have just described it, on the grounds that if God’s will and his intellect are formally distinct, and if that notion is developed in the way we have just described, then this implies a plurality of metaphysical principles in God — and so compromises the divine simplicity.

Scotus felt the pressure of this objection, and in his later writings, revised his notion of the formal distinction in a way that he claimed avoided this result. I must confess, I do not see how the revised theory works, how it avoids the problem, or even what the theory is. Adams and Gelber discuss this revised theory in the places just cited. But I do not understand what the theory amounts to, and so I will say no more about it.

There is one other application of the formal distinction I want to mention. In at least some passages, Scotus says that the divine nature (= divinity) is formally distinct from the divine persons in the Trinity. The importance of this for my purposes is that a divine person is in no sense a nature. It is something that has a nature. Thus there is precedent for saying that a formal distinction does not require that both terms of the relation be natures. Perhaps, as here, only one of them is.

And, once we are willing to allow that, there seems no reason why we cannot also say that the distinction between Socrates and his humanity is a formal distinction too, so that there is a formal distinction between the individual and its nature. William of Ockham, later on, certainly interprets Scotus as holding this, and he is generally pretty accurate in his statements of Scotus’s views. But I am not clear about what Scotus himself says on this point.

All of this, of course, is subject to the extreme confusion and tentativeness of this whole cluster of doctrines in Scotus’s writings.

Note that for Aquinas, according to the Owens interpretation, this entire middle realm of natures, with their own special kind of being and unity, is rejected

wholesale. There is no real minor unity, and there is no formal distinction. Consider, for example, the following text from Aquinas's *Summa contra gentiles*, I, Chap. 26 (emphasis added):

What is common to many is not anything over and above the many except by the reason alone.

That is, the distinction between the common nature and the individuals that have it — between humanity and Socrates, for instance — is only a “distinction of reason” for Aquinas. For Scotus, the same distinction may be a formal distinction, as we just said, depending on how we interpret the formal distinction, but whatever it is, it is not for him a mere distinction of reason.

For Aquinas, we have two distinct words or concepts, ‘man’ and ‘Socrates’. But ex parte rei, there is nothing to answer to the term ‘man’ except just individual men, Socrates and all the rest. The distinction between Socrates and his nature is merely one of reason. They are numerically the same.

Note that this text is strong evidence in favor of Owens's interpretation of Aquinas. Nevertheless, the theoretical difficulties I raised against that interpretation still stand. If what is “common” to Socrates and Plato is nothing over and above the individuals themselves, then in what sense is it “common”? In my own view, there is equally strong textual pressure to interpret Aquinas as granting some kind of reality and unity to natures in themselves: every passage in which he affirms the Augustinian equation of being and unity is such evidence.

But, however you stand on that, it is quite clear that Aquinas does not yet have the vocabulary to allow different grades of identity and distinction on the side of reality. That comes with Scotus.

Now let's talk about some other (but related) things in Scotus.

In Scotus, we must carefully distinguish two notions: community and universality. Community is what the nature has in external individuals. Universality is what the concept has in the mind. Note that the nature in itself has neither one, for the reason we saw Avicenna give earlier. (If it did, then anything that nature was predicated of would also have to be common or universal, which is false.)

What is the difference between community and universality? Scotus says that for Aristotle, the universal is one in many, and predicable of many. As a matter of fact, there isn't any passage where Aristotle says both of these things at once, but

in any event this slogan became a kind of commonplace. Notice how it conveniently combines the metaphysical notion of universality with the predicational one.

The ability to be in many things is what Scotus calls community, and amounts to metaphysical universality as we saw it defined in Boethius's *Second Commentary on Porphyry*. The ability to be predicated of many is what Scotus calls universality, and amounts to predicational universality as we saw it defined in Aristotle's *De interpretatione* 7, and used by Abelard.

The “formality” or nature has community in external objects. It can be in many things at once; it is not “repugnant” to it (as they say) to be so. (This is so even if, as a matter of contingent fact, there is only one such thing — for example, if all human beings but one should be annihilated.) But the “formality” or nature out there in external objects is not yet able to be predicated of many things. In order to be able to be predicated of many, the nature has to be thought — and this is what constitutes it as a universal.

I take it the idea here is that the notion of “predication” is the notion of “predicating.” It is not something that happens in the logical or semantic abstract. Predication is an act that human beings perform, and they do it with their minds. So nothing can be predicated without being thought of or conceived. This seems to be the implicit reasoning here.

In any case, for Scotus it is the concept that is predicated of many, and so it is the concept that is universal.

Now let's think about that last claim. Recall that Avicenna had an argument that the universal could not be what is predicated — or rather that what is predicated could not of itself be universal. But a general concept is of itself universal — that is, it is of itself what is predicable of many without bringing anything else into the picture. How does Scotus get around this argument?

The argument, remember, was that if what is predicated were of itself universal, then whatever it was predicated of would have to be universal too. So it could never be predicated of singulars. The argument was just the converse of the argument about singularity.

When I predicate man of several people — say, of Socrates and Plato — what I predicate is just what is contained in the definition. I predicate “rational, sensate, organic, corporeal substance” of them. I do not predicate “this rational, sensate, organic, corporeal substance” of them, since I could say that of only one thing. (We discussed that reasoning earlier.) Neither do I predicate “universal rational, sensate, organic, corporeal substance” of them, since I cannot say that of any individual.

That was Avicenna. Note the assumption here: that singularity and universality accrue to the nature like accidents in the “quidditative” or intelligible order — that is, the order of natures. In other words, the assumption is that when you add those accidents (or whatever they are), you change or add to the intelligible content of what you started with. You get a new and richer (less indefinite) concept. That is why they get in the way of predication. (You are not predicating what you thought you were.)

This is not so for Scotus. Singularity and universality for him are not further determinations of the nature, so that they too would belong at the level of natures. Rather, they are what he calls “modes.” This notion of a “mode” came to be a characteristic of the Scotist school.

A “mode” for Scotus is whatever can be added to a nature without changing its intelligible content. For instance, an example that was sometimes given: the intensity of white light is a mode of that light.

Question for homework: What — if anything — does this notion of “mode” have to with the notion of “mode” in Descartes and Spinoza later on?

Note, incidentally, that the introduction of modes allows a new kind of distinction: the modal distinction. This too came to be a characteristic of the Scotist tradition. The light and its intensity are only modally distinct. It is not a real distinction, between two things or res, since the mode is not a thing or res in its own right. It is not a formal distinction, between two “formalities” or natures, or between a nature and an individual res (for example, humanity and Socrates), since formalities or natures determine. They belong to the formal, intelligible, quidditative order. And it is not a mere distinction of reason either, since the distinction appears to be on the side of reality.

Another question: Is there is special kind of unity to go with the modal distinction? Presumably there would have to be, but I know of nowhere Scotus discusses it.

Existence, for example, Scotus regards as a mode of a nature. (This, incidentally, sounds a lot like Kant.) Hence Scotus rejects Aquinas’s real distinction between essence and esse. Of course, this may be only a terminological point. The so called “real distinction” between essence and esse meant something quite different in Aquinas than the “real distinction” does for Scotus. It is not clear that they are really disagreeing here.

Singularity and universality are also modes of the nature for Scotus. They do not change the nature’s intelligible content; they do not determine the nature any further in the quidditative or intelligible order. They don’t give you a new concept. Hence they do not get in the way of predication as Avicenna had argued

they would. So the way is left open for Scotus to think of predication as something a mind does, so that what is predicated of many for Scotus is of itself universal.

This part of Scotus is sticky business, and I'm not sure I fully understand everything that's going on here.

Now what are Scotus's grounds for positing real common natures like this? For Avicenna it was to account for the facts of predication, as we have seen. Scotus, as near as I can tell, has (with his theory of "modes") a somewhat different theory of predication, and it's not clear to me that the same factors are motivating him. So what are his reasons. Well, basically, he gives two "metaphysical" reasons and three epistemological reasons.

Note: Throughout this course, I have been maintaining that the basic pressures behind realism were epistemological, not metaphysical or ontological ones. So it is extremely interesting to see Scotus giving metaphysical reasons for his special brand of realism. They must be examined very closely, to see if they really do the trick.

Here are his metaphysical reasons:

- (1) Real common natures are needed to account for real relations, and in particular to account for real relations of sameness or identity.

In the Middle Ages generally, people talked about relations of sameness or identity corresponding to three of the Aristotelian categories. (You could have such relations in any of the ten Aristotelian categories, of course, but there was a special terminology reserved for only three of them.)

- (i) The category of substance, where the relation is called identity or sameness narrowly speaking. (In Latin, the terms 'sameness' and 'identity' are the same word, 'identitas' — from 'idem' = "same.")

A terminological point here: Earlier, when we were talking about the theory of identity and distinction in Scotus, we said that common natures have a kind of identity or sameness all by themselves; we called it real less than numerical unity. That's fine, and it's OK to use the terms 'identity' or 'sameness' in that way. But here we have a more restricted and specialized usage. Here we are talking about a

relation between two or more individual things (= res). And in this specialized sense, to say that two individual things are the same or identical is to say that they belong to the same genus or species.

For example, Socrates and Plato are specifically the same or specifically identical, since both are men. Socrates, Plato and Brown the Ass are generically the same or generically identical, since all three are animals.

Thus, within the category of substance, we can speak of generic or specific sameness or identity.

You might also, if you wish, speak of a relation of numerical sameness or numerical identity in the category of substance. In that sense, Cicero and Tully, for example, would be numerically the same or identical.

But in fact people did not very often talk this way in the Middle Ages. Numerical identity — that is, being the same individual thing — was not generally treated as a relation in the Middle Ages. Generally, they tended to regard relations as always involving at least two distinct terms. There was no reflexivity in the medieval theory of relations; they tended to regard all relations as irreflexive. Thus, they would not say that Socrates is identical with himself, but rather that Socrates is numerically one. That is, they treated numerical identity as a one-place “property” (in our loose, present-day sense of the term ‘property’) rather than as a relation.

So much for relations of identity or sameness in the category of substance. The two other categories where such relations were discussed were:

- (ii) The category of quality, where it is called similarity.
- (iii) The category of quantity, where it is called equality.

It is best to get used to these terminological fine points, to be sensitive to them and observe them. Medieval authors did not say “equal” where they meant “identical,” or vice versa. And they did not say “similar” when they meant “equal,” or vice versa. Thus, if Socrates and Plato both weigh 175 pounds, they are equal in weight (a quantity), not similar or alike in weight.

In any case, in order to account for all these real relations of sameness, Scotus thinks there must be something in each case on the part of reality that joins the relata. This something cannot be numerically one all by itself, or else it could not be in both relata at once to join them. Therefore, it must have a real unity, but a unity that is less than numerical. It must be real, because real relations of similarity, equality and identity are not just the products of our minds.

In a real relation of this kind, you have three factors involved, according to Scotus:

- (a) Two things (= res) that are related, the so called “relata.” Each of these is numerically one, and the two are really distinct from each another.
- (b) A foundation for the relation — that is, something that is shared, a common nature, a formality. This has a real less than numerical unity of its own.
- (c) The relation itself, relating the two relata and founded on the common nature. For instance: similarity, equality, generic or specific identity.

Thus:

Relation		
Foundation in <u>x</u>	=	Foundation in <u>y</u>
<u>x</u>	≠	<u>y</u>

For Scotus, the relation itself is a third thing, a third res. It is really distinct from each of the two relata x and y.⁷ The foundation, however, is only formally distinct from the relata.

- (2) The second metaphysical reason Scotus gives for positing real common natures is this: They are needed to explain causality.

Between cause and effect there is — at least in some cases — a nature shared. For example, fire causally produces fire. This kind of causality is what people called “univocal” causality. They recognized, of course, that this is not what happens in all cases. For example, the sun is a cause of life down here on earth, but it is not itself alive. But this does not affect Scotus’s point. He only requires that some cases of causality are univocal.

For Scotus, this fact about causality would be so even if there were no intellects or minds. Fire causes fire whether anyone thinks about it or not. Thus, the unity of the nature that is shared in univocal causality must be not just a product of the

⁷It is really distinct because it is *separable*. If x exists but y is destroyed, then x’s *relation* to y is destroyed. And likewise if y continues to exist but x is destroyed. If the relation is taken as depending causally on the relata, then the converse independence relation need not hold. (That is, for a real distinction we do not need for it to be possible to have the relation exist without x, or for the relation to exist without y.)

mind, not just a mental fabrication. It must be real. But it cannot be numerical unity, since nothing causes itself. Therefore, it must be a real but less than numerical unity.

These then are Scotus's metaphysical reasons for positing common natures with their own real less than numerical unity. It is perhaps worth your trouble to decide what you think of them.

Here are Scotus's three epistemological reasons for positing real common natures:

- (3) We need them to provide a proper object for the intellect and for the senses.

For the intellect — that is fairly clear. The idea is that the object of the intellect is what is common. We frame our knowledge in terms of the common or general. We pigeonhole things. And, unless the mind is to be regarded as producing its own objects, these common natures must be real — that is, mind-independent. Knowing is supposed to be a discovery, not a making. (In short, Scotus rejects idealism.)

The case for the senses is more interesting. There was a famous “Aristotelian” slogan that people often cited in the later Middle Ages. The slogan can't actually be found in Aristotle himself in just this form, but it certainly expresses an Aristotelian point of view. The slogan is:

Sensation is of particulars, but understanding of universals.
(*Sensus est particularium, intellectus autem universalium.*)

Aquinas, for example, accepts this slogan, and lots of other people did too. This, incidentally, makes the distinction between sensation and understanding very nice and neat in Aquinas; they have different kinds of objects.

Scotus, however, disagrees with both sides of this slogan. On the side of the intellect, the disagreement is mainly verbal. The proper object of the intellect for Scotus is not the universal, he thinks, but rather the common nature. (Recall the distinction between community and universality in Scotus.) Scotus is willing to accommodate the traditional terminology of the slogan by calling the universal concept a “complete” universal or universal “in act,” whereas the common nature all by itself is only an “incomplete” or “potential” universal. In any case, it is only the common nature, not the fully universal concept, that is the object of the

intellect for Scotus. As I said, the disagreement here is mainly verbal. What Scotus calls common is what others wanted to call universal.

But more important, Scotus disagrees with the part of the slogan about sensation too. For Scotus, intellect and sense have exactly the same kind of proper object. (What then is the difference between intellection and sensation for Scotus? That is a good question, and it is not at all so neat and tidy as it was in Aquinas.)

The argument for this interesting view is as follows. I hear sound, for example, of a certain pitch and quality. I see a color of a certain shade, and so on. The object of hearing is not this individual occurrence of the sound, and the object of vision is not this individual occurrence of the color.

Suppose the entire field of vision were filled by a certain shade of red. Then suppose it disappears and things get completely dark, and then the same shade of red returns and again fills the entire field of vision. What do we say? Do we say “There it is again,” or do we say “There’s another one just like the one before?” We don’t know which to say, which just shows that sensation, when left to its so called “proper sensibles,” does not reach as far as individuals.

The object of a sensory faculty, therefore, is going to have a real unity, to be sure, but not a numerical unity. Therefore, it will be a real less than numerical unity. Sight distinguishes white from green, but not this occurrence of white from that one.

We do in a way sense individuals, to be sure, but we can discriminate individuals in perception only if we take into account the so called “common sensibles” — features that, unlike the “proper sensibles,” can be perceived by more than one sense faculty (for example, place and position, which can be both seen and felt). If we do not take those into account (as we cannot in the example where the shade of red fills the entire field of vision), then we cannot discriminate occurrences.

Suppose God created two physical objects with exactly the same dimensions, color, and so on. The sense of sight could not distinguish them on the basis of proper sensibles, but only on the basis of position, which is a common sensible. If position is not at stake, then sight cannot discriminate between them at all.

Thus, the proper objects of sensation are common natures, and only those — not individuals.

(4) Common natures are needed to explain predication.

This does not of course mean the common nature just by itself is what is predicated; we’ve seen the arguments against that. Rather the universal concept is what is predicated. Instead, the common nature is needed to ground the

objectivity of predication. If the universal were totally a work of the mind, rather than a work of the mind done to something real, then predication would be a fiction. Once again, knowing is discovering, not making.

- (5) Common natures are needed to provide proper subjects for the sciences.

According to the authority of Aristotle, for instance in the *Posterior Analytics*, science deals with the “universal.” Scotus interprets this as referring to the incomplete universal — the common nature. The basic idea here is that science is not about this individual or that one, but rather deals with types and classes. When a biologist raises a culture in a little dish, he’s not the slightest bit interested in those little microbes as individuals. He’s only interested in them insofar as they are typical representatives of their type — what Scotus would call their nature. If these natures, these (incomplete) “universals,” were not real, then science would be a pure product of the mind, a kind of mental invention. Once again, the same point: Knowledge is supposed to be a discovery, not a making.

Scotus argues that if the objects of a science were not real, but totally the work of the mind, then every science would deal with concepts. (They are what are the products of the mind.) Now the science that deals with concepts — that is, with what is predicated — is logic. Hence, Scotus thinks, if there were no real common natures, all the sciences would be reduced to logic. Whatever you may think of this consideration, Scotus was not the only one to appeal to an argument like this.

Now I want to weave together a few miscellaneous but important themes:

In Scotus’s opinion, there is no need for any special outside help to ground our knowledge, as there was for instance on the old Augustinian theory of “illumination,” according to which in order to have real, full-fledged knowledge the mind needs some kind of outside help from God; it is simply incapable achieving real knowledge on its own. The classical Augustinian reason for saying there is such a need was that the individual object is changeable and mutable, and so too is the intellect. (It is a creature, after all, and only God is supposed to be absolutely immutable.) Neither the object nor the intellect itself was “firm” enough to ground certain and fixed knowledge. This is basically a Platonic approach to knowledge.

For Scotus, all this is simply not so. Material individuals are changing, to be sure, but they have immutable common natures in them. And so there is something in the individual, after all, that is sufficient to ground knowledge.

In effect, this was just Aristotle's answer to Plato, as I discussed in the *Warp and Woof* handout. Just as Aristotle doesn't need Plato's theory of reminiscence to account for our knowledge, so too Scotus doesn't need the Augustinian theory of illumination. His theory of common natures is what makes this work.

Aquinas was another one to make this move explicitly. He can do it because he too wants to find a fixed and immutable nature in things. But Aquinas's and Scotus's views on how the common nature in the individual works in knowledge will be quite different.

The difference concerns the role of the so called agent intellect, that part of the mind that has the job of abstracting universal concepts from individuals and of recording them ("stamping" them — like the old "seal-ring" metaphor) on another part of the mind, the receptive or passive part. (On this complicated but very rich doctrine, see the handout "Aristotelian Epistemology and Its Arabic Developments.")

As we said, Aquinas accepts the Aristotelian dictum: "Sensation is of particulars, but understanding of universals." Now recall that for Aquinas, at least on Owens's interpretation, there is no distinction on the side of reality between the individual and its nature. There is no real distinction, and there is no formal distinction, since Aquinas simply has no such notion as a formal distinction in any case. Hence there is only a distinction of reason. (Whether we accept Owens's interpretation or not, Aquinas does actually say this much. Recall our quotation from the *Summa contra gentiles*, I, Chap. 26: "What is common to many is not anything over and above the many except by the reason alone.")

Therefore, when sensation gets through doing its job of recording the "impression" of an individual object, the nature preserved in the sense image or sense impression is still individual. It is not yet common.

What the agent intellect has to do then is to work on the sense image, to separate the common nature from the individuating conditions. Just how it does this is not very clear, since the common nature (at least on Owens's interpretation) has no being of its own.

In fact, I think Aquinas's notion of the role of the agent intellect has all the same difficulties we saw when we were talking about the notion of abstraction in Boethius. Aquinas's descriptions are more a kind of program of what has to be done than a real explanation of how it gets done. The agent intellect in Aquinas is a real black box. Think of it as somehow "warming up" the sense image, so that it mysteriously releases these vaporous natures. (The difficulties I find with Aquinas's account of abstraction are just another form of the difficulties we have already discussed with his theory of common natures.)

Then, only after all that is done, is the nature ready to be recorded and actually known by the mind. The agent intellect does this chore too.

So for Aquinas, the agent intellect has two jobs to do. First, it must somehow get the common nature out of the particularized sense image, and then it must, second, record the result in the “receptive” part of the mind.

For Scotus, the agent intellect has much less to do. In the individual thing (= res), the individual and its nature are distinct. There is a distinction for Scotus on the side of reality. It is more than just a distinction of reason. It is not a full-fledged real distinction in the technical sense of that term, but it is a formal distinction. Hence the nature present in the individual already has a community — that is, it already has the ability to be in many.

That is why Scotus can say the sensible image is of the common nature and not of the individual, without needing to postulate any kind of agent sense after an analogy with the agent intellect. Nothing has to be done to the nature to get it ready to be a proper object of sensation. (That’s true for Aquinas too, but for a completely different reason — for Aquinas, the object of sensation is the individual.)

Likewise, for Scotus nothing has to be done to the nature to get it ready for the intellect. There is no “warming up” needed here. Scotus’s agent intellect doesn’t have that task to perform. All it has to do is to read off the common nature from the sense image, and then impress it on the receptive part of the mind.

For Scotus, the agent intellect is first a selecting device, and then a kind of printing press. That first task is quite different from what goes on for Aquinas. The agent intellect for Aquinas has to do more than just select. The common nature is not already there in the sensible species or image, just waiting to be read off. There is nothing to select. That is the whole point about the metaphysics of common natures — again, at least on Owens’s interpretation.

The agent intellect has less to do for Scotus than it does for Aquinas. For Scotus, the agent intellect really acts, but it doesn’t act on the sense image. It acts only on the receptive side of the mind.

Remember how I said Aquinas sounded like a realist if you pushed him one way, and like a nominalist if you pushed him another way? Here we see how Aquinas splits the difference. The difference between Scotus’s and Aquinas’s (epistemological) realism is in the role of the agent intellect. It has more to do for Aquinas than it does for Scotus, and to that extent Aquinas is less realistic, I suppose.

A good Rule of Thumb: The more realist you are, the less work you will think the agent intellect has to do.

Now William of Ockham — and we might as well begin talking about him now to some extent — will be a nominalist. He doesn't think we even have an agent intellect. And this is not because its task would be so easy it is not needed. Rather, it is because the job of abstracting on Ockham's theory would be so difficult as to be impossible. For Ockham, we simply cannot form concepts by abstraction in the traditional way. He is a nominalist of the strict observance.

Aquinas distinguishes himself from Ockham's view insofar as for Aquinas, the agent intellect still has a possible task to perform. It is not asked to do the impossible. (At least, he thinks it isn't impossible; you, like Ockham, might disagree.)

Remember the two sides to the old problem of universals, the metaphysical side and the epistemological side. We can give a metaphysical and an epistemological formulation of both realism and nominalism, as they developed in the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries. (See the handout "Duns Scotus: Kinds of Unity and Distinction.")

In the metaphysical formulation, realism holds that the common nature (taken absolutely, as Aquinas would put it) has a being of its own; nominalism says it does not.

In the epistemological formulation, realism holds that the common nature (taken absolutely, as Aquinas would put it) is the ground of our knowledge, its basis in the world; nominalism says it is not.

In these terms, we can say (see the handout once again) that:

Aquinas is a metaphysical nominalist but an epistemological realist.

Scotus is a realist on both the metaphysical and the epistemological formulations.

Ockham is a nominalist on both the metaphysical and the epistemological formulations.

If you concentrate on the metaphysics (and buy Owens's interpretation), Aquinas sounds almost indistinguishable from Ockham. If you concentrate on the epistemology, he sounds like a realist, and so a bit like Scotus. Only if you take both sides into consideration do you see what is going on in the large. Of course, there are still huge problems with Aquinas's theory, as I have indicated earlier.

Here these problems show up in his theory of the agent intellect. Its performance is very mysterious in Aquinas.

Here are some further questions to keep in mind when thinking about Scotus:

- (1) How is sensation distinguished from understanding? They both have the same object for Scotus, the common nature. What then is the difference between these two mental faculties? Why do we need them both? Or do we?
- (2) How do we get knowledge of the individual? This is sticky in both Scotus and Aquinas. Aquinas has trouble saying how we can understand or intellectually know anything about the individual, since “sensation is of particulars, but understanding of universals.” For the same reason, of course, he has no trouble saying how we sense the individual. Scotus has trouble on both sides. Ockham will press Scotus on this point. We obviously do know things — both at the level of sensation and at the level of understanding — about individuals.

This problem of knowledge of individuals gives rise to a theory of what is called intuitive cognition in both Scotus and Ockham, and in lots of other fourteenth-century people too. We won’t discuss it here. If you are interested, there are two chapters on it in my *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham* (on physical reserve in the Wells Library).

- (3) Why is the agent intellect needed at all for Scotus? If the common nature is present in the individual and already capable of impressing itself on the sense without the aid of any agent sense, then why can it not impress itself on the mind too, without the aid of any agent intellect? (A possible answer: The common natures are presented all together, all mixed up, in the sense image. Something is needed to select the one to be impressed on the mind. But still, does that mean the second job of the agent intellect — its impressing job — is idle?

Scotus on Individuation

Two of Scotus’s big contributions to philosophy were the notion of real minor unity and, for all its obscurity, the formal distinction. Another was his theory of

individuation, with its famous account of “haecceity” or “thisness.” That is what we are going to talk about here.

Reading Assignment: The text from Scotus in *Five Texts*, together with the notes on that text in the *Notes and Texts*.

For Scotus, natures by themselves have community, a real minor unity, as we have already seen. So there is no need to inquire about a cause or principle of community. Natures “just come that way.” On the other hand, natures are not by themselves universal, and they are not by themselves individual either. Something has to be done to them to make them universal or individual. Hence it is appropriate to ask about the “principle of universalization” (and that is going to be the mind or intellect), and about the “principle of individuation.” We still have to look at the latter.

What is it, then, that you have to add to the common nature to yield an individual? What is it that contracts the common nature to this individual? (This “contraction” talk is characteristic. Get used to it.)

Recall the several senses of the term ‘principle of individuation’ that we have distinguished several times already.

- (1) What makes something an individual? (This we agreed to call the “principle of individuality”.)
- (2) What makes an individual the individual it is? (This we agreed to call the “principle of identification” or the “principle of identity.”)
- (3) What distinguishes one individual from another — either in different species or in the same species? (The “principle of differentiation.”)

For Aquinas, as you will remember, these questions have different answers. The answer to (1) depends on how you interpret the question:

If you mean “What makes something an individual as opposed to a heap,” the answer is: the one act of esse that ties the whole thing together.

If you mean “What makes something an individual as opposed to a species or genus,” the answer is matter, since it is only in the case of material species that there is any distinction between the species and the individual.

The answer to (2) for Aquinas is esse.

The answer to (3) is form in general, substantial form if we are talking about interspecific differentiation, or matter-entailing accidental forms if we are talking about intraspecific differentiation.

In the Boethian tradition of individuation by accidents — as we saw it suggested in Boethius's *De trinitate*, and then explicitly held in William of Champeaux's first theory and in Clarembald of Arras — the answer to both (2) and (3) is the same: accidents. (The answer to (1) is not altogether clear in this tradition, and may differ from author to author. Perhaps accidents play this role too.)

As for Scotus, when he is talking about contracting the species or common nature to the individual, I think he is primarily concerned with question (2), that is, the principle of identification. But that is not completely clear to me. He may also be talking about the other questions too.

So for the present let's just adopt the blanket-term 'individuation', and hope we can come to sort out exactly what questions Scotus is trying to answer with this doctrine.

Scotus treats the topic of individuation in a number of places, but perhaps most importantly in a series of questions in his *Oxford Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, the so called *Ordinatio*. The text is contained in the *Five Texts*.

Peter Lombard was an important twelfth-century author who compiled a work called the *Sentences*, which means "sentences" in a quasi-judicial sense: "decisions," "verdicts." It does not mean just "statements." The *Sentences* of Peter Lombard was one of the first systematic and theoretical discussions of theology; it made use of both the authoritative texts of Scripture and the Church Fathers, and also of good hard argumentation. Since it was one of the first works of this type (and since it is pretty good too), it achieved the status of a kind of "standard textbook" in the medieval university system. Part of a student's training in the typical faculty of theology at a medieval university was to present a course of lectures commenting on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. Scotus did this in fact several times, at Oxford, Paris and Cambridge. The *Ordinatio* is his Oxford commentary. The term '*Ordinatio*' means that Scotus had the opportunity (and took the opportunity) to go over the text of his lectures carefully, revising and altering them, and in general getting them in polished form for "publication" (which meant copying out longhand — this was still well before the invention of the printing press around 1455). So it is an especially "authoritative" source for Scotus's doctrine on this and other points.

Lombard's *Sentences* was divided into four books, and each book was subdivided into a number of distinctions. In standard commentaries, the issues raised in these

distinctions were discussed in a series of one or more questions. These were generally written in the *quaestio* form we have already seen in a rudimentary state in Boethius' discussion of universals in his *Second Commentary on Porphyry*. By the time of Scotus, this *quaestio* form had become very highly developed.

The passage we are concerned with is in Scotus's *Ordinatio*, Book II, distinction 3, questions 1–6. There Scotus considers a series of five views purporting to identify the “principle of individuation.” Scotus argues against all of them, and then gives his own answer in Question 6.

In q. 1, Scotus asks: Is a material substance (and that is all he is talking about throughout this list of questions) one or singular all by itself — *ex se*? That is, does it just come that way? Is it *de se hoc* (= “by itself (a) this?”)? (The question put in this way might of course refer to any one of our three notions of individuation.)

Some people had said yes to this question, and others would continue to do so later on. For example, Richard of Middleton, Godfrey of Fontaines, and good old William of Ockham. (On some of the names and doctrines throughout this discussion, see John Wippel's book on Godfrey of Fontaines, as listed in the handout on “Reserves” distributed at the beginning of this course.)

Scotus argues against this theory. We have already seen some of his reasons, in the context of the two metaphysical and the three epistemological reasons for positing common natures, discussed earlier. (Not all of these reasons, however, are brought out in this question.)

But if the substance is not *de se hoc*, then of course we must look for an additional principle of individuation. Scotus tries various alternatives. Here then is a kind of road-map of the discussion:

- q. 1 — Is a material essence individual *ex se*? (Middleton, Godfrey, Ockham)
- q. 2 — by a negation? (Henry of Ghent)
- q. 3 — by existence? (Giles of Rome)
- q. 4 — by quantity? (Aquinas, roughly, although he might be a little surprised to find himself described in these terms.)
- q. 5 — by matter? (Aristotle, Aquinas)
- q. 6 — Scotus's own view

(Notice, incidentally, that there is nothing whatever in this discussion about individuation by all the accidents, as we found this doctrine suggested in Boethius's *De trinitate* — although q. 4 is about one kind of accident.)

Question 2 considers the view that individuation is somehow accomplished by a negation. This peculiar-sounding theory was in fact maintained by Henry of Ghent, a close predecessor of Scotus's and an influential philosopher in his own right. Many of Scotus's arguments are directed against Henry of Ghent, whom Scotus regards as a very serious opponent.

Henry of Ghent had the misfortune of not belonging to one of the new religious orders that had just got started in the 13th century (such as the Dominicans and the Franciscans). He was a priest, certainly, but belonged to what is called the “secular” clergy rather than the “regular” clergy — those who were subject to the “rules” of a certain religious order. As a result, Henry didn't come to have the partisan defenders some of the members of the “regular” clergy came to have, and consequently he is largely unknown to the present day. But that is by no means his fault. He was an important and influential man in his own day.

According to Henry's theory, the common nature is not contracted to the individual by adding any new positive ingredient. So there is no positive principle of individuation. The positive features of Socrates, the ones that actually make him up and so are not accidental — the pin-cushion, as opposed to the pins (see the *Warp and Woof* handout — are exactly the same as those of Plato.

Henry's point is based on the very notion of an individual. An “individual,” as the etymology of the term (‘*in + dividuum*’) would suggest, is undivided. This means two things for Henry:

- (a) The individual is not identical with any other being.
(Otherwise it would be, in a sense, divided from itself.)
- (b) The individual is also internally un-divided. It is not a heap, but more a unity than that.

(Notice how these two points correspond to senses **(3)** and **(1)** of the term ‘principle of individuation’, as we distinguished them earlier.)

Observe that both **(a)** and **(b)** are put negatively. And since **(a)** and **(b)** encapsulate just what it is to be an individual, this means that individuality can be described in purely negative terms. This twofold negation is the principle of individuation for Henry. No positive principle is required.

Scotus replies to this view as follows. This is indeed what we mean by an “individual,” Scotus agrees. But what is it that makes it impossible for an individual to be internally divided in this way? What prevents it from being identified with any other being? Henry has tried to find the principle of individuation by simply describing its effects. In effect, he has given only a job description for the principle of individuation, but not told us what fills that job description. That is not enough.

In other words, this two-fold negation Henry appeals to comes too late to serve as a principle of individuation. What Henry is describing is the effects or result of individuation, not its cause.

Furthermore, Scotus argues, this twofold negation appears to be just the same in the case of Socrates as it is in the case of Plato. Both are unities and not heaps, and neither is identical with anything distinct from itself. So it looks as if the twofold negation Henry describes is itself common, and so stands itself in need of individuating. (In effect, this criticism is based on sense (2) of the notion of “individuation” distinguished earlier — the “principle of identification.”)

We are still a long way from solving our problem. It appears we must look for some positive principle of individuation.

Thus we go to Question 3, where we consider one suggestion for such a positive principle of individuation — namely, existence.

Despite what you might think at first, Scotus is not thinking of Aquinas here, for whom existence is a principle of “individuation” in some senses but not in others. Instead, he is thinking of a certain Giles of Rome, a “follower” of Aquinas, who nevertheless revised Aquinas’s views in certain respects. (For what it is worth, Giles later on became the more or less “official” philosopher of the Order of the Hermits of St. Augustine.)

Giles’s theory seems to be this:

Existence is the ultimate and final actuality of a being, what makes the whole thing real in the end. And actuality or act (as opposed to potentiality) always determines and distinguishes. That is, for Giles act and potency are always related as the determinate to the (relatively) indeterminate. (Note that he is certainly thinking here of “individuation” in sense (1) distinguished earlier, but also perhaps in senses (2) and (3).)

What Giles has in mind here is the Porphyrrian Tree. There, substance is potential with respect to being either corporeal or incorporeal. The differentiae actualize that potency; they determine and distinguish. And so on down the tree, making each step more and more “actual.”

The last step on the tree in the individual — Socrates, for example. (Recall, from our discussion of the Porphyrian Tree at the beginning of this course, that there was some ambiguity about whether to put individuals on the tree or not. But this need not stop us here, and apparently didn't stop Giles.) Now it is the individual that actually exists. So it looks as though actual existence is the individual difference — like the “specific difference” — that determines individuals within the species. Existence is the last actuality. For him, the last step on the Tree gives you individuals.

Scotus's reply to this theory is twofold:

- (1) First, existence pertains to a nature only after it has already been fully determined or contracted to an individual. In other words, existence comes too late to be a principle of individuation. When I am given “substance,” I can ask “Is it corporeal or incorporeal?” So too, when I am given “Socrates,” the individual nature, I can still ask “Does he exist or not?” Existence, remember, is for Scotus a mode, and so does not affect the content of what exists. Existence, for Scotus, is not on the Porphyrian Tree at all. It has nothing to do with intelligible content, which is what the tree is all about. Thus, it cannot serve as in individual difference or principle of individuation.

Aquinas would accept the basis behind this objection. Esse for Aquinas is an act, but it is not of the same order as the differentiae on the tree. Esse is totally off the tree; it is not a form.

- (2) A second criticism Scotus raises to this view is one Aquinas would not accept. It runs like this. Existence, like the nature itself, is not individual all by itself; it is not *de se hoc* (= *by itself this*). Hence it cannot serve as a principle of individuation. Existence needs to be contracted to the individual just as much as the nature does. In fact, existence is more common than any species or genus is. It is the most common thing of all, and hence needs to be contracted most of all. (This seems addressed to sense (1) of the term ‘individuation’.)

Aquinas would not accept this argument. Esse for him is not something common; it does not need to be contracted. Each act of esse is totally “isolated” from every other one. They are not shared, and they themselves do not share anything. Since Aquinas does not accept the Scotist theory of modes, therefore, if esse were common, it would be just like any other common nature. There is no other way of being common for Aquinas. But the whole point of Aquinas's doctrine of esse is to contrast it with natures. It stands over against natures, to such an extent that

there is a real distinction between them (with, of course, all due caution exercised about the term ‘real distinction’ in connection with Aquinas).

In Question 4, Scotus considers the suggestion that quantity is the principle of individuation. The position here is like this. Take a common nature — say, fire. Now this fire differs from that fire only insofar as the form of fire is received into different parts of matter. But one part of matter differs from another part of matter only by quantity — that is, by size and shape, dimensions and location. Hence it is only quantity that divides part from part, and therefore the principle of individuation in the end reduces to quantity. This of course is the theory of designated or signate matter associated with Aquinas, and in different variations with Avicenna and Averroes. Aquinas, however, might not have recognized his own doctrine when it is presented like this.

Again, Scotus raises a twofold objection:

- (1) First, quantity is an accident of an individual substance. But substances are naturally prior to their accidents, not the other way around. Therefore, quantity cannot individuate. (Recall that Abelard has a criticism like this against William of Champeaux’s first theory.) We need a principle of individuation that is not accidental, but belongs to the substance itself. In terms of the pin-cushion analogy I developed in the *Warp and Woof* handout, we need a principle of individuation that is down there in the cushion, and is not one of the pins. Quantity comes on the scene too late.
- (2) Second, quantity is not de se hoc any more than the nature is. It is common too, and so it also needs a principle of individuation. (Remember the problems with Averroes’ doctrine of “indeterminate dimensions.” The same problems are operative here.)

Just as for Questions 2 and 3, the objections here are that quantity **(a)** comes too late to do the job of individuating, and **(b)** is not de se hoc anyway, and so itself stands in need of individuation.

As a last resort, Scotus considers in Question 5 the view that matter is the principle of individuation. This view is associated with Aquinas, as we saw when we were discussing his theory, but his view is much more complicated and involves much more than just matter. Aristotle, however, appeals to matter as a principle of individuation in many places. I gave you the references earlier.

Scotus’s objection to this view runs like this: Matter is part of the nature of a material substance, together with the form. Hence it is just as common as the nature itself is, and stands in need of a principle of individuation too.

Here is where the notion of designated or signate matter comes in. Aristotle may or may not have had anything like this; probably not. In any case, Aquinas does. Part of the motivation behind signate matter is to answer just this problem, to individuate matter, so to speak. But there are monstrous problems with the theory of signate matter, as we discussed earlier. Scotus's objection seems a good one.

Note, incidentally, that Scotus cannot (and does not) argue here that matter comes too late to individuate, that the nature is already individualized before matter comes on the scene. That just isn't so.

Finally, after exhausting the opposition, Scotus turns to explain his own theory on the topic, in Question 6.

For Scotus, the individual difference is a special kind of entity, not to be identified with any of the items considered so far. Let us ask what conditions it must fulfill.

- (1) On the Porphyrian tree, each of the inferior or lower steps contains something not contained in the superior or higher steps. Each lower step adds a positive determination. Since the individual is the last step on the tree, and since the individual difference is how one makes that last step, therefore the individual difference must be a positive entity, and not just the mere absence or negation of something. We already know this much from Scotus's criticism of Henry of Ghent's theory, in Q. 2.
- (2) Furthermore, the individual difference must somehow combine with the specific nature to form a substantial unity, not just an accidental unity. We already know this from Scotus's criticism of the quantity-theory, in Q. 4.
- (3) The individual difference must be the last difference on the Porphyrian tree. (See Q. 3, Giles of Rome's theory.) Here's why: At each lower division on the tree, all the higher stages still apply; the higher stages can all be predicated of the lower ones. For example, an animal is also an organism and a substance. But this stops at the level of the individual. Thus, if you divide up the species man into Socrates and Plato, each of them is a man, an animal, an organism, and so on. But if you divide Socrates up, you get

parts of Socrates, which are not themselves Socrates. (The question whether the whole is predicable of the part is, to a first approximation, just the difference between what people called a universal whole made up of subjective parts, and an integral whole made up of integral parts.)

- (4) The individual difference cannot be intellectually conceived in the sense of forming a concept of it in the standard Aristotelian way. If it were conceivable, then because the object of the intellect is the general or common, the individual difference would be common itself, and so would itself need a further principle of individuation. No, the individual difference must be *de se hoc*. (Recall Scotus's claim that singularity was mode of a nature, so that adding it does not alter the intelligible content of the nature.)

Points (3) and (4) are what make the individual difference special. It is in these respects unlike the other differences on the tree.

The idea behind (4) is that generality or community must stop at the level of the lowest species.

Now since common natures are the proper objects of the understanding, and even of sensation, the individual difference is not going to be very easy to get at or to understand. The individual difference is a very mysterious entity for Scotus. The mind is not really at home among individuals on Scotus's doctrine. It is most at home with common natures. Even the senses have only a very indirect awareness of individuals. For Scotus, the most mysterious thing around us is individuality.

(In this respect, it is interesting to compare Scotus's notion of the individual difference with Aquinas's notion of esse. Each is very mysterious and hard to conceptualize. Each has a crucial role to play in the theory of individuation. We shall say a little more about this shortly.)

In the literature on Scotus, you often see the term 'haecceity' (= "thisness"). This is perhaps not Scotus's own term for the individual difference. (The manuscripts of Scotus do not agree with the early printed editions here — which are quite old and badly in need of revision.) Perhaps the term was coined by the early followers of Scotus and soon found its way into the manuscripts. In any case, it is a pretty

good term to describe what is going on. How do you get from animal to man? Add rationality. How do you get from man to this man? Simple: Add thisness.

If you look at what Scotus has done from one point of view, it is easy to say that his notion of the individual difference is hopelessly ad hoc, and so has “all the advantages of theft over honest toil,” as Bertrand Russell once said.

After all, what is the individual difference exactly? By his own admission, he cannot say. All he has is a job description for it (the one we’ve just seen in requirements (1) to (4)). He has no idea at all what it is that does that job.

As a result, you might say that Scotus has got himself into serious trouble. He has contrived a metaphysics of common natures that need a principle of individuation. But then he systematically denies that it can be any of the familiar things in his metaphysics. It is not matter, not a form, or at least not an intelligible form (since then it would be common). It is not an accident, not esse.

Now that’s a problem, you might well object. But instead of facing it, and admitting that nothing in his metaphysics can possibly do this necessary job, Scotus manufactures on the spot some totally new and previously unheard of entity the sole purpose of which is to get him out of this problem.

Is this not a paradigm case of an ad hoc move?

But don’t be so sure. Maybe it is and maybe it isn’t. (In fact, I think it is a very fruitful philosophical exercise to reflect deeply on the notion of the ad hoc.)

After all, what should Scotus have done? Granted, it would have been nice if he could have said more about what this individual difference is, but that doesn’t mean what he did say is illegitimate or suspicious. It is not as though Scotus found himself by chance in the position of needing to appeal to this mysterious entity. He has arguments: We need a principle of individuation. Natures are common by themselves, not individual — for the two metaphysical and three epistemological reasons we discussed earlier.

But, as have seen, the principle of individuation cannot be any of the other things we have considered in this series of question, for the reasons given.

In short, if all the arguments work, then Scotus has a proof that there is a principle of individuation of the kind he says, even though he can’t say any more about it.

In the face of that proof, just what was he supposed to do? Just freeze up and panic?

The moral of this story is: Always be slow to accuse a philosophical move or a theory of being ad hoc. There is almost always a reason (whether you think it is a good one or not) why the author felt compelled to make the move he did.

Haecceity for Scotus is not a thing (= res). It doesn't combine with the nature as two things combine to form a third thing — as matter and form, for instance, combine to form a composite material object.

(For Scotus, matter and form are really distinct. God can make either exist without the other. This is part of the Augustinian tradition: matter even by itself has a certain minimal degree of actuality. This is quite unlike Aquinas's theory, for instance.)

Socrates's nature (humanity) and his haecceity are not two things, but two "realities," not two res but two realitates. There is (perhaps) a formal distinction between them.

Note: Haecceity or the individual difference really introduces a new and fourth level into Scotus's ontology, in addition to individual things, common natures and concepts. Haecceity is not a thing, it certainly isn't a common nature, and it isn't a concept. Is it then a mode? I'm not sure. On the one hand, perhaps it is. Recall that earlier we said that both universality and individuality (that is, thisness, haecceity?) were modes of a nature. On the other hand, perhaps not. Recall that just a little while ago, we saw Scotus give an argument against the notion that esse is a principle of individuation, on the grounds that it is a mode.

Remember how both community and individuality belong to the nature outside the mind, for Scotus. Community, we said, is the possibility of being in many. That is, it is not repugnant or inconsistent with the nature to be in many. Even if there were only one human being, humanity would still be common in this sense. As for individuality, the nature has it too outside the mind, not ex se of course, but rather only in virtue of something else, in virtue of the individual difference, the haecceity.

Haecceity or thisness at first looks a bit like the notion of a bare particular that was discussed in certain philosophical literature in the middle of the twentieth century. But, at least as far as most of that literature is concerned, the two are not the same at all. Haecceity does not underlie anything; it does not exemplify anything; it is not a subject of predication. Socrates's haecceity is not Socrates himself. Keep these differences in mind when you read various recent philosophers who announce that they are going to do such and such in a "Scotist" way, or that such and such in their theory is the equivalent of Scotus's haecceity. Those I've seen are for the most part not equivalent at all.

If we look back over Scotus and Aquinas, and look ahead a little to Ockham, it is worth saying that one of the big differences among these people is over the question where you want your great mystery. For Aquinas, it is esse, which is very strange for him. (We have no concept of it, recall.) For Scotus, it is haecceity or individuality. For Ockham, as we shall soon see, it is universality or commonness.

Scotus's haecceity in some ways plays a role in his philosophy comparable to that of esse for Aquinas. It is worth thinking about this a long time. Both at the very heart of their respective philosophies. In both cases, it is the positive principle of individuation (in at least sense **(b)** of that term — a principle of identification, what makes Socrates Socrates), there is no proper concept to be had of it, it is not a common nature, not a universal. Each individual has its own. And it is not a thing, but a kind of “principle.” It is not a thing because it cannot exist separately, and what it combines with cannot exist separately from it.

Let me finish this discussion of Scotus with a few miscellaneous remarks.

(1) First, Scotus's view of God. God is special in Scotus's ontology. For him, the divine nature is the only nature that is *de se hoc*. God just comes already individual. He needs no principle of individuation to narrow divinity down to the one God. Everything in God is *de se hoc*. There is a formal distinction, to be sure, between God and his will, his intellect, and so on, but all those formally distinct features are nevertheless quite individualized, and are all *de se hoc*.

But perhaps even more important in view of what is just coming up, for Scotus there is nothing really common between God and creatures. This was of course more or less “standard” medieval doctrine. It was a “commonplace.”

The idea was this: If there were some metaphysical feature common to God and creatures, then God would have to be composite. He would have the metaphysical feature he share with creatures, but he would also need some additional ingredient to distinguish him from creatures. But God cannot be composite, because composites need efficient causes. We first saw this notion with Aquinas, but it is a view that is by no means confined to him.

In Scotistic terms, therefore, God must be *de se hoc*. If there were something common to God and creatures, then this something would have to contracted to God, so that he would not be simple any longer. For Scotus, therefore, and for Aquinas and others too, there is quite a sharp and radical metaphysical gap between God and creatures. There is nothing in common there.

Nevertheless, for Scotus at least, we can form a universal concept common to God and creatures — for instance, the concepts “being,” “good,” and so on. We can do this because creatures are like God in various degrees, even though they share no nature of any kind with God.

Aquinas disagreed. Not only is there no metaphysical nature common to God and creatures, there is no concept that can be applied univocally to God and creatures either. Aquinas then goes on to offer instead his famous theory of analogy, which is notoriously difficult. The basis for Aquinas’s refusal to allow a univocal concept to apply equally to God and creatures seems to be the assumption that if there were any such univocal concept in common, then there would have to be a common nature to ground it. This nature would then require some kind of principle of individuation, so that God would end up being composite, with all the problems we have just seen.

Oddly, this means that in a sense it is Aquinas who is the more “realist” here. It is Scotus who, in this one special case, refuses to allow that a common univocal concept implies a common nature, which view has always been one of the main pressures in favor of realism. Ockham will hit Scotus hard on this point.

(2) Second, remember the basic principle that goes back to Parmenides, the identification of being with intelligibility. What is most fully real is also most fully intelligible. Now in the Aristotelian tradition in which Scotus finds himself, the individual is what is most fully real, what most fully is. Hence the individual is in itself intelligible. There is nothing in the individual that is opaque to intelligence in principle, including its haecceity or thisness. God and the angels, for instance, know the individual through and through. We do not, unfortunately. For us, individuals and their individuality constitute the most mysterious things around us. In our present life, we have a direct and immediate knowledge only of common natures — both in intellection and in sensation. Sensation nevertheless can get some small grasp on the individual by means of the common sensibles. So too the intellect can get a minimal grasp on the individual by turning to the sense impression or image, the so called “phantasm.”

Aquinas has a similar doctrine, the so called *conversio ad phantasmata* as an account of our intellectual knowledge of individuals. How does it work in Scotus? Remember that the job of the agent intellect for Scotus was to read off one by one the common natures that were all simultaneously present, but mixed up, in the sense-image. The sense-image presents all at once a number of common natures. These will include the proper objects of the various senses — colors, sounds, and so on — and also the common sensibles — place, shape, orientation, size, and so on. Note that all these are accidents, and they are all common. We do not come into direct cognitive contact with common natures in the category of substance.

Neither do we come into direct cognitive contact with thisness. Nevertheless, we can form a complex concept of the individual by describing it in terms of these accidental features, including position and the common sensibles, which are included in the sense-image.

If we think of concepts as forming the vocabulary of a mental language (as Ockham and others would do), then there are no proper names in a Scotist mental language, only descriptions.

Knowledge of the individual can only come about in this very discursive and laborious way. Essences (in the category of substance) and haecceity are opaque to us. Recall the Boethian tradition of individuation by accidents. Scotus is in effect saying that, while metaphysically that doctrine is just backwards — putting the prior after the posterior — nevertheless epistemologically it is correct. That is exactly the way we come to know the individual, even if it is not the way the individual comes to be constituted.

Ockham

We turn now to Ockham.

First of all, please note his name. It is spelled ‘Ockham’ — not ‘Occam’, as you sometimes see it. The latter is the French spelling, and has achieved some currency in the English secondary literature because many of the most prominent historians of medieval philosophy in the early part of the twentieth century were Frenchmen. But in fact, it is a place-name. Ockham was born in the town of Ockham, in Surrey, and it is spelled ‘Ockham’. Just to put him in chronological perspective, you should know that he was born sometime around 1385 and died in 1347, probably of plague. (Sometimes you see the year 1349, but it is now pretty well established that that’s wrong.) Scotus, you will remember, died in 1308.

Reading Assignment: Please read everything that’s left in *Five Texts*, and in the *Notes and Texts* — that is, all the Ockham material. Note: I am not stupid. This adds up to many pages of very dense stuff, and I know perfectly well you are not going to read it all carefully. But it’s assigned anyway, so just do your best.

Sometime before 1350, an anonymous author wrote a very interesting work with the title *De principiis theologiae* (= *On the Principles of Theology*).

At one time the work was thought to be possibly by Ockham, but it is now pretty generally agreed that it isn’t his. Nevertheless, the doctrine in the little treatise is genuinely “Ockhamist.” And this makes the work all the more interesting, because it purports to systematize all of Ockham’s philosophy and theology

around two main principles, from which the author then “deduces” various “theorems” of Ockhamism in a systematic fashion.

Neither of the two main principles is unique to Ockham, although both are certainly guiding ideas in Ockham’s thought, to which he returns again and again. Here they are:

- (1) God can do whatever is not absolutely impossible. There is nothing new about this claim, of course. Everyone held this in effect, and had for centuries. But in Ockham and his contemporaries, there is a new emphasis on the power of God. God is not bound by natural necessity, the laws of nature. In short, God is boss, not Aristotelian physics. For the background on this development, see *The Course in the Box*, Ver. 2.0, on the so called “Condemnation of 1277,” and for some interesting applications, see the chapter on “Intuitive Cognition.”
- (2) The so called “Ockham’s Razor”: Don’t multiply entities beyond necessity. In other words, get by with as much theoretical economy as you can. Note that Ockham nowhere enunciates this principle in the form in which it is usually given (and in which I just gave it). And even if he had, there would have been nothing novel about it. You can find similar statements in Scotus, after all. Almost everyone agreed on the principle; the disputes are always over just how many kinds of entities are really “necessary.”

Principle (1), divine omnipotence, is primarily a theological principle. It follows from the doctrine of creation. Here’s how:

The doctrine of creation holds the following two claims at least:

- (a) God produced everything other than himself. He did not, like the Platonic Demiurge, simply shape some pre-existing materials. No, he produced the materials too. Absolutely everything other than God himself is a product of God’s creative activity.
- (b) God didn’t have to do this. He didn’t have to create at all, and given that he did create, he didn’t have to create things the way he did. Again, God is not like the Platonic

Demiurge, who has to do what he does out of the necessity of his nature.

From (a) it follows that there are no external constraints on God's creative powers, since before he creates there is no external anything. And from (b), it follows (although there may be some steps to fill in) that there are no internal constraints either. Hence, combining these two claims, it follows that there are no constraints at all on God's creative powers, which is just to say he is omnipotent.

In this sense, then, the doctrine of divine omnipotence is a theological claim. And Ockham explicitly recognizes it as such. He says he finds it in the Creed: "I believe in God the Father Almighty...." (And of course he did find it there.)

Principle (2) is the main thing that is always associated with Ockham's nominalism. Ockham rejects Scotus's theory of common natures. He doesn't think they are needed to explain the facts. Thus, for Ockham, the only things that exist are individual substances and their individual qualities (that is, for example, the whiteness of this particular piece of chalk). There is nothing metaphysically common for Ockham.

Digression: There are two separate issues here. Ockham not only thinks he can do without universals. He also thinks he can do without all the Aristotelian categories except for substance and quality. All the rest can be reduced, he thinks, to those two. The secondary literature often very carelessly lumps these two issues together under the heading "nominalism," as though they were the same thing. But in fact they are entirely separate issues. It is quite possible to think there are no universals, and yet that you need to allow entities in all the traditional Aristotelian categories (or in a different combination of them than Ockham allows). And it is equally possible to think you can reduce the number of Aristotelian categories as Ockham does, and still to think you will need to allow universal entities in some or all of these categories. All these possibilities are actually realized in various medieval authors.

Sometimes people wonder why Ockham picked substance and quality as the only two non-eliminable categories. Why those two? Well, substance is pretty basic, but why include quality? Why not eliminate it too?

For example, Ockham thinks there are no real entities in the Aristotelian category of relation. (Technically, that's not quite true. He is willing to allow a few highly specialized kinds of relations because he thinks they're required by certain theological considerations — for instance, in the case of the Trinity. But there

aren't any relations in the purely creaturely world.) Ockham is perfectly willing, of course, to say that substance A is really related to substance B in various ways. He doesn't deny that. What he does deny is that this fact requires us to posit novel entities in the category of relation. He thinks he can account for A's being related to B without appealing to anything like that.

Why then doesn't Ockham do the same thing with quality? Why doesn't he say, for instance, that the apple just is red, and that this does not require us to postulate a distinct redness in the category of quality?

I don't know for certain, but I have a deep suspicion that the answer is in the doctrine of the Eucharist. Ockham, like everyone else at this period, held that at the moment of consecration during the Mass, the substance of the bread and wine of the Eucharist is no longer there, but is replaced by the body and blood of Christ. On the other hand, the accidents of the bread and wine are obviously still there — we can sense them: the whiteness of the bread, its taste, etc. Of course, we can't say that these accidents inhere in the body and blood of Christ. The body of Christ, for example, isn't white and flat and small like the bread.

So what do we do with the accidents of the bread and wine after the consecration? The standard doctrine was that they just hover there, accidents without an underlying substance. This sort of thing would never happen in the normal course of events, to be sure, where accidents always require a substrate. But, according to the doctrine, it does — and therefore can — happen in the Eucharist. And this means, of course, that we must allow in our ontology some accidents in addition to substances.

Although I know of no text to support this conjecture, I suspect this is one of the main reasons Ockham did not go all the way and eliminate entities in all the Aristotelian categories of accident.

Back to Ockham's rejection of universals. Because Ockham denies Scotus's common natures, there is for Ockham no such thing as real minor unity, no such thing as the formal distinction. The only kind of real unity is numerical unity. The only kind of distinction on the part of reality is the real distinction between separable entities (separable at least by the power of God). There are no Scotist formalities, only things (= res). So far, except perhaps for the criterion of the "real distinction," this sounds just like Thomas Aquinas on the Owens interpretation.

Ockham's world is therefore made up of a number of isolated units, sharing nothing at all in common. Again, this sounds like Owens's version of Aquinas. Ockham thinks this is Aristotle's doctrine, and is moreover supported by

experience. We encounter only individuals, after all, in our experience. (So much for Scotus's view that we never encounter individuals, even at the level of sensation, but only common natures.)

Ockham thought he was perhaps the first one to understand all the implications of this. In any case, he thought his predecessors had betrayed this basic idea by giving lip-service to it, but then granting that nevertheless in some sense there is universality or community in the world anyway.

In effect, what Ockham has done is to take Scotus's view of the relation between God and creatures and make it paradigmatic of the relations among all things. In other words, Ockham is arguing in effect, if you can have a concept that equally applies to God and creatures, even though there is nothing really common or shared by them, as Scotus thinks you can, then why can't you do the same thing in the case of creature and creature? Remember, Scotus had some arguments about the need for real common natures to ground the objectivity of our concepts. (Recall his epistemological arguments for common natures.) If those arguments are any good to begin with, then they should apply just as much to concepts common to God and creatures as they do to concepts common only to creatures. There is nothing in those arguments that restricted them to only certain concepts and not to others; they are quite general. Conversely, therefore, if those arguments do not apply to concepts common to God and creatures, then there must be something wrong with the arguments. But then why should we think they apply anywhere?

Of course, Ockham is not going to pin his metaphysics on the adequacy or inadequacy of Scotus's view of God's relations to creatures. He needs independent arguments, and has to show that Scotus's arguments do not hold.

There is another way too in which Ockham will take Scotus's talk about God as paradigmatic. Scotus says the divine nature is *de se hoc*, but is the only nature like that. Ockham is going to say the same thing holds of every nature whatsoever. Every nature is by itself a this. It is already individual, and does not need to be individuated. This is just the theory Scotus discussed in his Question 1. (Others had held it before Ockham — for instance, Richard of Middleton and Godfrey of Fontaines — so Scotus wasn't prophesying about what Ockham would say later on.)

Thus, for Ockham, there is no need to look for a principle of individuation, as Scotus and others had done. All that is just so much wasted effort. What we need to explain is not the individual, but the universal concept. How do we get that, if everything is as individual as Ockham says it is? In short, Ockham has the epistemological problems we learned to expect from nominalism as far back as the very first lecture in this course.

In his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, Book I, distinction 2, questions 4–8, Ockham gives us a long “treatise” on the universal. I have translated the whole thing for you in *Five Texts*.

For some reason, although the passage we looked at from Scotus and this passage from Ockham are absolutely crucial texts in the later medieval history of the problem of universals — and despite the fact that scholars have known this centuries — the translation in *Five Texts* are the first time they have ever been translated into English in full.

There are some other relevant texts of Ockham on universals in the *Notes and Texts*. I’ll mention them as needed while we’re going along.

In connection with the long Ockham passage in *Five Texts*, it is probably good to look back to the table of contents at the beginning of that volume. This will provide you with a little outline of Ockham’s discussion in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, so you will be able to keep track of what is going on. As the discussion unfolds, Ockham considers progressively less and less realistic views, until he concludes that the universal is only in the mind, that it is only a concept.

Now let’s go through Ockham’s discussion.

In question 4, Ockham considers the view that a universal is a real thing (a res), outside the mind and in individuals, really distinct from them, and not “multiplied” according to the multiplication of individuals.

The last clause — about “not being multiplied” — just means you have only one in several individuals. If you perform the “plucked chicken” experiment we have done so many times before, this theory says you have only one humanity in Socrates and Plato after you get done pulling off all their distinguishing features. This is perhaps the same as the realist theory we saw earlier in William of Champeaux’ first theory, and in Clarembald of Arras. I say perhaps because at that time there was not yet a developed vocabulary and doctrine about the “real” distinction, so it is hard to know what they would say about it.

Nevertheless, I think the author Ockham has primarily in mind here is almost certainly not any of those people, but rather his contemporary Walter Burley (also spelled ‘Burleigh’). I have translated an important text of Burley’s, his *On Universals*, in the *Notes and Texts*.

When the critical editors of Ockham’s writings published the Latin edition of this passage in 1970, there was not much known about Walter Burley’s views. It was known that he had a reputation as a realist of some stripe or other, and that he and

Ockham engaged in a kind of controversy over certain semantical principles. But that was about all.

Since then, however, more has come to be known about Burley's views. And I think it is now pretty certain that Burley is the one Ockham has in mind here. The thing that makes me think this is the fact that on the theory Ockham is describing, universals are said to be present in but nevertheless really distinct from their individuals. And this was a characteristic feature of Burley's doctrine.

Burley's main reason for saying this (see his *On Universals*, §§ (57)–(61) in the *Notes and Texts*, p. 87) is that opposite things can be truly said about universals and their individuals. Hence, by the principle of non-contradiction, they can hardly be really the same. (Note: This is exactly the same criterion of real distinction we said Ockham had. See formula I on the handout "More on Kinds of Unity and Distinction.") It's just the Indiscernibility of Identicals.

For example:

- (a) Universals are in many; individuals aren't.
- (b) Universals can be defined (at least some of them can — not, for instance, the most general genera); individuals cannot.

And so on.

Ockham says that the reasons given for this view are these (and all of them are in fact found explicitly in Burley's text, which lends credence to my identification of Ockham's opponent with Burley):

- (a) To explain definition. I define the universal man, not the individual Socrates. (As we discussed at the beginning of this course, individuals cannot be defined in the Aristotelian tradition.) That is why the people who hold this view say there is a real distinction between the individual and the universal (otherwise, when I define the one I would have defined the other), and why the universal is not multiplied according to the multiplication of individuals (why should it be, since they are really distinct?). (See Burley, *On Universals*, § (36) and elsewhere.)
- (b) To explain essential predication. When I predicate 'man' of Socrates, man must be really in Socrates, not separated from him. That is why the people who hold this view say

the universal is in individuals. (See, for example, Burley, §§ (30)–(31).)

- (c) To ground the objectivity of the sciences. (Recall Scotus's epistemological arguments earlier, and see Burley, § (45).)

Ockham's reply to this view is that it is totally false and absurd. (It is fun to watch how these epithets get less and less strong as Ockham considers less and less realist views.) If the universal is really distinct from the individual, then, Ockham says:

- (1) It would follow that God could create the universal without the individual and vice versa. But if you can have the individual without its universal, then what good does it do to posit the universal nature to begin with? (Don't multiply entities beyond necessity.)

Note: Ockham explicitly says that if the universal and the individual were really distinct, then each one could exist without the other. It goes both ways.

For Scotus, on the other hand, the theory of the real distinction was different. (See formula II.2 on the handout "More on Kinds of Unity and Distinction.") For him, it is only if the two really distinct things are not related in such a way that the one is causally dependent on the other that we have this two-way separability. Otherwise, only one half of it holds: the causally prior and independent one can exist without the causally posterior and dependent one, but of course not the other way around.

Ockham drops that proviso. For him — with only one exception — whenever two things are really distinct, each one can exist without the other. The exception is of course if at least one of the two is God. (If both of them are God — for example, if we are talking about the real distinction between two persons of the Trinity — then of course neither one can exist without the other.)

Whether this difference represents a genuine difference of theory about the real distinction, I am not sure. It may represent instead only the fact that Ockham has a different theory of causal dependence, which he certainly does.

For help with all this, consult Marilyn Adams, "Ockham on Identity and Distinction" (in the "Articles (Bibliography)" subfolder on Oncourse — the paper talks about Scotus as well as Ockham), and her book *William Ockham*, on physical reserve at the Wells Library. Also her paper, "Was Ockham A Humean

About Efficient Causality,” *Franciscan Studies* 39 (1979), pp. 5–48 (which I don’t have online).

- (2) Furthermore, Ockham says, this strongly realist view would not account for essential predication, which was one of the main considerations that motivated it in the first place.

If the universal man is really distinct from Socrates, then it is present in him only as a part, and parts are never predicated of their wholes. Socrates is not his hand, and in general wholes are not their parts — they have their parts.

If you object that this is true of integral wholes but not of universal wholes, Ockham will deny that it makes any difference. A universal whole (for example, animal) is predicated of its subjective part (for example, man), but for no type of whole is the part predicated of the whole.

(It seems to me that the whole force of this objection rests on Ockham’s claim that if the universal is really distinct from its individual, then it must be present only as a part. What reason is there to believe that? It’s not an implausible claim, but one would like to see this filled out more. I suspect Ockham has some quite general considerations from which this follows, but I am not sure what they are.)

In any case, Ockham thinks that, on the contrary, what is predicated is not any real universal at all, but simply a common term.

For Ockham, there is a sharp distinction between ontology and language. For him, there is none of this real predication stuff that we saw discussed (and rejected, at least for universals) by Abelard, and saw accepted by both Avicenna and Scotus. For Ockham, what is predicated is simply a term, a piece of language.

A term is individual just like anything else, metaphysically speaking. But it is “common” or “universal” in the sense that it stands for many things, or as Ockham says, “supposits” for many things.

(‘Supposition’ is a technical term from medieval logic. It doesn’t mean “assumption,” although that usage was current too. For present purposes, just read the term as “standing for” or “referring to.” The origin of the term is very obscure. But it appears to have come out of speculations on the Trinity. The term ‘suppositum’ is a technical term in Trinitarian theology — and in the theology of the Incarnation, for that matter. It means that in which other things “inhere” — as for instance accidents inhere in a substance — but does not itself inhere in anything else. One of the main branches of “supposition” is called “personal supposition,” which certainly

suggests the kinds of issues that arise in discussions of the Trinity and the Incarnation. If you're interested in a capsule summary of what you need to know about supposition-theory, see my chapter on "The Semantics of Terms" in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* — on physical reserve in the Wells Library.)

The term 'man' in the sentence 'Socrates is a man' stands for or supposits for men — for all of them. So too in the sentence 'Plato is a man'. Those sentences are true if and only if the predicate term 'man' stands for or supposits for what the subject stands for or supposits for (and perhaps more besides). Predication can be explained without appealing at any point to real universals. (Notice how all this sounds a little like Abelard — although of course the details turn out to be quite different.)

As for the first consideration that motivated this first theory of universals (the consideration about definition), Ockham has a theory of definition, developed in his *Summa logicae* and elsewhere, according to which terms are defined, not things. And of course the universal or common term IS "really distinct" from the individual or singular term. But that is no argument for Burleian realism.

With respect to the third and final consideration in favor of this theory (the consideration about science), Ockham holds that it is indeed true, as Aristotle had said, that science deals with universals. But the only universals there are for Ockham are universal terms, and primarily terms in mental language or thought — which is to say, primarily concepts. (Ockham regarded thinking as a kind of language of its own. If semantics is the theory of the relation between language and what that language is "about," then we can say that the semantics of mental language is a branch of epistemology.)

For Ockham, the object of a science is simply sentences with general terms in them. That's how he accommodates Aristotle's dictum that science deals with the universal.

This of course doesn't mean that we can never, in our knowledge, get beyond the level of language to things. For Ockham, there are two senses of the term 'know' (= *scire* in Latin, from which comes *scientia* = "science"):

- (a) As we just said, the sense in which to know is to know a sentence, or a term in that sentence. In this sense, the object of a science is universal.
- (b) We can also be said to know what that sentence is about, what the subject-term in it stands or supposits for. What we know in this sense is invariably the individual,

metaphysically speaking, since there is nothing else for Ockham. This is not the object of science in the sense Aristotle is talking about.

Traditionally, there were three kinds of sciences people distinguished: **(a)** the so called “real” sciences: physics, metaphysics and mathematics; **(b)** the so called “rational” science: logic; and **(c)** “grammatical” science: grammar. For each of these kinds of science, Ockham distinguishes a kind of “supposition.”

- (i) Going with “grammatical” science, there is what is called “material” supposition, in which terms stand for words they do not signify. For example, in ‘Man has three letters’, the subject term ‘man’ is in material supposition — at least in the sense in which the sentence is true. (But don’t make the mistake of thinking that Ockham’s “material supposition” is just what we do with quotation marks. It is more complex than that.)
- (ii) Going with the “rational” science of logic, there is what is called “simple” supposition. There terms stand for concepts they do not signify. These concepts are the genera and species that logic talks about. For instance, in the sentence ‘Man is a species’ (in the sense in which it is true), the subject term ‘man’ stands for the concept “man,” which is a species — that is, a species-concept. It definitely does not stand for any real universal man.
- (iii) Going with the “real” sciences, there is what is called “personal” supposition (which has nothing especially to do with persons — although it perhaps originated in theorizing about the persons of the Trinity). There terms stand for the things they signify. For example, in the sentence ‘Man is an animal’, the subject term ‘man’ is in personal supposition, and stands for individual human beings. They are the ones who are animals. The spoken or written word is not an animal, and neither is the concept.

What I have just given you is just a tiny taste of the very elaborate and subtle doctrine of supposition. But notice, no universal entities are needed to do any of this. This is in effect Ockham’s answer to Scotus’s epistemological arguments for common natures. They are just not needed for predication or science — or for definition, for that matter.

There is another Scotist argument, however, that has not yet been answered. It is the epistemological argument that common natures are needed to serve as the objects of intellect and sensation. Remember the dictum, “Sensation is of particulars, but understanding of universals.” Scotus had disagreed with this, and said that intellect and sense have the same object — namely, the common nature.

Ockham too denies the dictum. He too thinks sensation and intellection have the same object, but he goes the opposite way from Scotus. For Ockham, that object is the individual. On Ockham’s ontology, there is simply nothing else for it to be. I can know an individual term that stands or supposits for many things, and can in that sense be said to know a universal, since by means of the term I can be said to know the many things it stands for. But there is no appeal to a common nature involved in any of this.

So much for question 4.

In question 5, Ockham considers a somewhat less realistic view of universals. This is approximately the view of Gilbert of Poitiers and Boethius in his *Commentary on Porphyry*. It is also approximately William of Champeaux’s second theory.

I am not sure who Ockham is thinking of in this question, but he is perhaps thinking of a certain William of Alnwick (pronounced “Annick”). Scotus describes such a view, and attributes it to Alnwick.

According to this theory, the universal is a res outside the mind, really distinct from individuals, but nevertheless in them, and is multiplied according to the number of individuals. It is the last clause that distinguishes this theory from the one just considered in question 4.

On this theory, the universal is multiplied in the same way the impression of the signet-ring is “multiplied” according to the number of times you stamp it on different spots of wax.

Ockham’s verdict on this view is that it is simply false (which, I suppose, is not so bad as being totally false and absurd, as the first view was, to its shame). On this theory, Ockham says, there is an individuating difference that contracts the nature and multiplies it. The nature is really distinct from the difference, and therefore God can create the humanities of Socrates and Plato, say, without the individuating differences. (Once again, note Ockham’s criterion of the real distinction here.) But if that actually happened, and God did create the humanities of Socrates and Plato without their individuating differences, those humanities

would still be two humanities — or so at least Ockham says. But, if they would still be two in the absence of any individuating differences, they would perforce be two all by themselves.

Why is Ockham so sure that the humanities of Socrates and Plato would continue to be two even in the absence of their individuating differences? Well, the point is just that if they were not two but one, then we are back to the first view, and we have already discussed that in question 4.

Hence, Ockham concludes, the individual difference is superfluous on this theory. The only function it is supposed to perform can be done just as well without it.

This is a curious argument, and I am not sure how to evaluate it. Surely William of Champeaux and Gilbert of Poitiers never spoke of any individuating difference in these terms, and they certainly didn't say such an individuating difference was really distinct from the nature it differentiates, at least not in the sense of the term 'real distinction' Ockham has in mind. I don't know about William of Alnwick's view here.

In question 5 especially, and perhaps also in question 4, Ockham is perhaps taking unfair advantage of the notion of real distinction. Surely the authors of these views never meant to imply that the individual could exist separately from its universal ingredients. When they said the universal is really distinct from the individual (or from the individuating difference — if in fact anyone ever really said that), all they probably meant was some kind of distinction grounded in reality. Such a distinction could perhaps be less than what came to be defined later as a real distinction in the technical sense. Perhaps something like Scotus's formal distinction would be closer to what they really had in mind.

Well, this brings us naturally to Scotus's own theory, which Ockham discusses in question 6. He gives a pretty accurate account of what Scotus's view is. (In generally, Ockham was scrupulous about presenting Scotus's views correctly. He regarded Scotus as a worthy adversary, and wouldn't stand for any quick and easy "victory" based on a mere caricature.)

We have already seen what Scotus himself had to say about all of this. Here is the way Ockham puts it: According to this theory, the universal (Scotus would call it only an "incomplete" or "potential" universal, the common nature) is outside the mind, in individuals, but distinct from those individuals by a distinction based in reality — only that distinction is not a full-fledged real distinction but instead only a formal distinction.

Ockham thinks this theory is unreasonable (which is not so bad as being totally false and absurd, or even as being simply false). He simply rejects it. For Ockham, only concepts are common — and, derivatively, we can say that spoken or written terms are common too, insofar as they are “subordinated” to common concepts, which is to say: insofar as they express those concepts through the conventions of language.

Ockham simply refuses to accept the idea that there is any distinction at all on the side of reality, real or formal, between the individual and its nature. He doesn’t think any such distinction is needed, or in fact that any such distinction even makes sense.

In effect, Ockham is pressing some logical points against Scotus. Recall how Scotus’s real less than numerical unity was a kind of “unity” that allowed us to say opposite things at once about the common nature. Ockham is emphasizing the logical difficulty of making sense out of this.

What then about Scotus’s own actual arguments? What does Ockham have to say to them?

Well, the epistemological arguments have in effect already been answered. We talked about them when we were discussing Ockham’s question 4, dealing with a stronger form of realism than Scotus had, to be sure, although the same kinds of considerations apply here as well.

But what about Scotus’s metaphysical arguments for common natures? There were two of them, recall. First, that they were needed to account for real relation of sameness, similarity and quality, and second, that they were needed to account for real univocal causality. Since the basis for the second argument is the idea that the effect must be similar to the cause, the second argument is really just a special case of the first one. So Ockham has to show us how we can have real relations of similarity, equality, and so on, without appealing to Scotist common natures.

Ockham’s answer is: Let’s just look at what happens here. We observe men, let us say, to be much alike. Because of their being similar, we can form a specific concept of “man.” Ockham even uses the term ‘abstraction’ to describe this formation process, but it is certainly not abstraction in the usual sense. It doesn’t mean there is anything shared by those similar men.

Things are really similar. Ockham never denies that. But they are not really similar in virtue of some third entity, a similarity. They are just similar all by themselves. If there is no common nature needed to ground the fact that creatures resemble God in varying degrees (as Scotus had already granted), then none is needed to ground the fact that one creature resembles another.

Furthermore, Ockham gives some arguments against Scotus's theory of relations in general. First, he gives a kind of "regress"-argument that I don't understand very well. Second, he argues that if, as Scotus says, the relation is a third thing really distinct from the relata (as Scotus had said), then God could create it separately. In that case, of course, we would have a similarity without there being anything similar. And Ockham thinks that's just silly.

Here again we see the difference between Ockham's notions of the real distinction and Scotus's. This result would simply not follow on Scotus's theory of the real distinction.

For Ockham, relations are just relational terms. Things really are related to one another, but they are not related to one another in virtue of some entity we call a relation. They are just related to one another all by themselves.

In question 7, Ockham considers an even less realistic theory of universals — but still too realistic for his own tastes. According to this view, universals are outside the mind and in individuals. (Notice, incidentally, that Ockham never considers the theory that universals are outside the mind but separated from individuals — like Platonic Ideas. They clearly aren't universals in the sense people were discussing. Recall Boethius's definition of a universal and our discussion of how, on this notion of a universal, Plato was a nominalist.) In addition, according to this theory, universals are not distinct from their individuals by any distinction on the side of reality, either a real distinction or a formal distinction. The distinction between the universal and the individual is only a distinction of reason.

(Recall Aquinas's own statement, *Summa contra gentiles*, I, Chap. 26: "What is common to many is not anything over and above the many except by the reason alone.")

Ockham considers three variants of this theory. The first one has not been identified, so let's just skip over it. The second one, however, is Aquinas's theory — or at least the way certain Thomists put Aquinas's view. According to that theory, the same common nature is singular according to the actual esse it has in things, but it is universal according to the esse it has in the mind.

Ockham's response to this is that nothing can be made universal just by thinking about it, just by being considered. For Ockham, understanding something is not a case of doing something to it. It is not acting on the thing. That seems obvious (or at least it seemed obvious before Kant came along at the end of the eighteenth century, with a whole different point of view on all this). But Aquinas's view

seems to be committed to the opposite. For Aquinas, the intellect, for instance, acts on the nature and separates out the individuating conditions.

Why is Aquinas committed to this implausible view? Well, he wants to say that in the two sentences ‘Man is an individual’ and ‘Man is a universal’, we are talking about the same thing, the same nature. In the first sentence, we are talking about the nature as it is in real, external objects. There, it is individual. But in the second sentence we are talking about the same nature as it is in the mind. There, it is universal. The Aristotelian theory of knowledge, according to which the knower is the known, requires that we be talking about the same thing in these two sentences.

Ockham does not have any of these theoretical commitments. For him, the two sentences simply involve two different kinds of supposition. In the first case, the term ‘man’ has personal supposition, and in the second case it has simple supposition. The terms stand for quite distinct things. As Ockham sees it, Aquinas is just guilty of equivocation.

What this means is that Ockham is giving up the old Aristotelian principle that the knower is the known. And with it, of course, he is giving up one of the best guarantees of the objectivity of our knowledge. It is not surprising, therefore, that nominalism is tied up with skepticism. (Not that Ockham embraced skepticism. But it is easy to see pressures in that direction in his doctrine — pressures he in fact resisted.)

The third variant theory Ockham discusses in question 7 is the theory of Henry of Harclay, originally a follower of Scotus, who later turned critical of Scotus. This theory is very close to Ockham’s own — but it is still not quite there.

Henry’s theory in fact sounds a lot like the view of Walter of Mortagne, which Abelard had argued against. On that theory, remember, Socrates insofar as he is Socrates is an individual, and insofar as he is a man he is a species, and so on. But it’s identically the same thing — namely, Socrates — we’re talking about in each case.

On Henry’s theory, the universal is outside the mind, in things, not distinct from them by anything greater than a mere distinction of reason, and not in such a way that thinking about it makes it universal.

For Henry, outside the mind everything is individual *de se hoc*. Ockham would applaud this. There is no individual difference; none is needed. Ockham would cheer this. But, Henry says, each individual can affect the mind in two ways:

- (a) It can make me know it distinctly — that is, it can cause a clear concept of itself.

- (b) It can also make me know it “confusedly” — that is, it can cause a more vague concept in me, one that represents not only that individual, but also any other individual similar to it in certain relevant respects.

Henry appeals to no common nature in any of this. Nevertheless, it is still too realistic for Ockham.

But what, you may well ask, is realistic about this? It looks like a pretty austere nominalism. Well, Ockham says, Henry is still trying to find some ground for the universal concept in things. What it all comes down to is this:

For Henry, like everyone else we have been considering so far, it is possible to derive a universal concept from a single experience of a thing. For fairly strong realist views this is quite easy; the mind just reads off a universal that is already present in its experience, even a single experience of a single instance. This is the way it is for the realism of William of Champeaux’s first theory, and the theory of Clarembald of Arras. This is also pretty much the way it is for Scotus. For Aquinas, on the Owens interpretation, it’s a bit harder. The agent intellect has more work to do for Aquinas. It cannot simply read off the universal from the single experience. But still, it can get the universal concept from a single experience, if it just goes to enough effort. How it can do this is of course a great mystery.

For Ockham, however, no universal concept can ever be derived from a single experience. It takes at least two experiences, which are then compared with one another, before we can get a universal concept. (In this respect, Ockham’s view sounds like, say, Locke’s.) And that is what is wrong with Henry of Harclay’s theory. As long as the same object can all by itself affect the mind in two ways, in one way producing a singular concept that is a concept only of that object, and in another way producing a general or universal concept of that thing and of other things similar to it — as long as the same object can do that all by itself, that is still too much for Ockham.

(Incidentally, this provides us with an instructive rule of thumb that is very useful for measuring an author’s realism or nominalism: “Can we or can we not form a general or universal concept on the basis of a single experience?”)

In question 8, Ockham draws his conclusions from all this. Universals are not outside the mind at all. Universals are in the mind. They are concepts. And he doesn’t then compromise this, as Scotus did, by saying that of course there is a

kind of “incomplete” universal or common nature out there in the world. No — community too can only be found in the mind.

(Ockham is willing to say that spoken and written terms, which are not in the mind, are also universal or common. But their universality or community is derivative from that of concepts, and is by no means the kind of thing realists are thinking of. So it is not oversimplifying things too much to say that for Ockham universality and community can be found only in the mind.)

Universals, then, are concepts. But what sorts of things are concepts? Well, Ockham considers four theories of concepts in question 8.

- (1) The first theory makes the concept a conventional sign. That is, what it is a concept of is a matter of arbitrary agreement or convention. This view has been attributed to Roscelin by some scholars, but heaven only knows what Roscelin really thought, or who Ockham was thinking of.

In any case, Ockham rejects this theory. For him, the concept is a natural sign. That is to say, what it is a concept of is not a matter of convention or arbitrariness. It is fixed by nature. In fact, Ockham thinks concepts are likenesses of the things they are concepts of. He has a kind of “picture”-theory. Such “picture”-theories are notoriously difficult to work out in detail, but at any event it is clear that for Ockham it is not just a matter of taste or convention what concepts are concepts of.

Setting that view aside, then, there are three other theories that Ockham ways are “probable.” (This just means that you can give a probatio = “proof” = pretty good argument. It is not “probability” in the statistical sense.)

In this passage from the *Commentary on the Sentences* (translated in *Five Texts*), Ockham just leaves it at that. He does not seem to make up his mind and decide among the three theories, although he leans toward what is called the “fictum”-theory. The three views he considers are these:

- (a) The “fictum”-theory, that the concept is a thought object, and has only an esse objectivum (= “objective being” — objective not in our sense, but in the sense of being an object of thought, an intentional object.) On this theory the concept is not identical with the act of understanding, but is instead the object of that act. The theory is very much like Abelard’s fictum-theory earlier. On this view, the concept is very much like a “picture.”

Ockham later on rejected the fictum-theory. He did so primarily because of arguments raised against the theory by one Walter Chatton, a contemporary of Ockham. (There's a passage from Chatton in the *Notes and Texts*.)

Chatton and Ockham almost certainly knew one another, and probably taught together as colleagues.

Ockham took Chatton's arguments very seriously, and in fact changed his mind because of them. As far as I can figure out, Walter Chatton has the curious distinction of being the only person who ever got William of Ockham to change his mind — about anything!

We can see some traces of this in Ockham's *Ordinatio*. (Recall the meaning of this term — his own revised and corrected version of his *Commentary on the Sentences*. We have Ockham's *Ordinatio* only for Book I of his *Commentary*. But that is OK, since that is the part that contains the discussion we are now considering.)

What appears to have happened is that Ockham wrote a version of a *Commentary on the Sentences*, in which he maintained the fictum-theory fairly definitely. Chatton saw this version and criticized the view. Then, when Ockham later went back to his *Commentary* to go over it and prepare it for final "publication," he added some material to take account of Chatton's objections and tone down his own commitment to the fictum-theory.

These later passages are identified in the critical Latin edition, and I have flagged them in my translation in *Five Texts* by enclosing them in pointed brackets.

I have also given you a passage from Chatton, in which he criticizes the fictum-theory as Ockham had held it. It is contained in the *Notes and Texts*, and comes from Chatton's *Reportatio*. (Unlike an *Ordinatio*, a *Reportatio* was not gone over by the "master's" own hand. Instead, it amounts to student's lecture notes, with all the horrible possibilities that opens up.)

Reduced to their most basic form, Chatton's arguments went (in part) roughly like this:

A fictum, a merely intentional object, would not be real in the sense that it would not fall into any of the ten Aristotelian categories. How then could it be like the objects it is supposed to represent? Concepts are supposed to be natural likenesses of their objects. But how could something that is not even in an Aristotelian category be like something that is?

Furthermore, this theory leaves itself open to all the skeptical difficulties of a representational theory of cognition (think of Descartes!). For these reasons, then, Ockham later gave up the fictum-theory.

According to the two other “probable” theories, the concept or universal has an *esse subjectivum* — a “subjective being.” (Something funny happened to the terms ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ in the history of philosophy. They got completely turned around. Ockham’s subjective being means what we would mean by objective being — the being of a real subject or substance, or if not a substance, then at least a real subject of predication. I suspect this reversal of meanings was due to Kant, but I can’t prove it.)

On these two theories, the concept is a real quality existing in the soul, and therefore does fall into the Aristotelian categories. Concepts are accidents of the mind, and really inhere in the mind just as color really inheres in a body.

Note: It would seem that at least the first objection that led Ockham to reject the fictum-theory would also apply here. How can a quality in the mind be really similar to the substance Socrates? They are not even in the same category! So there is just as much a problem of getting concepts to be in general natural likenesses of their objects on this theory as there is on the fictum-theory. I don’t know why Ockham apparently didn’t anticipate this point.

There are two varieties of this theory, the first with two subcases:

- (b) The concept is distinct from the act of understanding but is still a real quality inhering in the mind. On this view, the concept can be either:
 - (i) Prior to the act of understanding. In that case it would be what is called the intelligible species. This was the usual term for what the agent intellect somehow got out of the sense-image and then impressed on the receptive faculty of the mind. (Of course that process is totally different in Ockham than it is for the other people we have looked at.) Or else it could be
 - (ii) Posterior to the act of understanding. This is called the mental word (= *verbum mentale*, or *verbum mentis* — the term applies to theories besides Ockham’s as well). This is the term for the result of the agent intellect’s

impressing the intelligible species on the receptive faculty of the mind. (The “act of understanding” in all this presumably refers to the act of the agent intellect in impressing the intelligible species on the mind’s receptive faculty.)

- (c) The concept just is the act itself. This is the so called intellectio-theory. Abelard referred to it, and rejected it without any real argument. I called your attention to that fact at the time, and commented that it would come up again. Here it is.

In the relatively early *Commentary on the Sentences* (which is the passage we have been working through now), Ockham seems to favor the fictum-theory, even in his revised, *Ordinatio* version, although he does not unequivocally come down for any one of them. But in his later *Commentary on the De interpretatione*, he seems to favor the intellectio-theory. (See the passage from that commentary contained in the *Notes and Texts*.) It does not lend itself to the difficulties of the representational theory of cognition, as the fictum-theory does. And there is no need on the intellectio-theory for an intelligible species, as there is on both forms of theory (**b**), so that on grounds of theoretical economy, it is perhaps preferable. In any case, in his late work, the *Quodlibets*, Ockham definitely comes down in favor of the intellectio-theory to the exclusion of the others. (Again, see the passage from the *Quodlibets* translated in the *Notes and Texts*.)

Note: The term ‘*quodlibet*’ basically means just “whatever you please.” It was the term given to disputed questions that were actually conducted in open forum at various ceremonial times of the year according to medieval academic customs. At these times, a “master” would post an announcement that he was going to conduct a quodlibet, which meant in effect that he would debate all who came along on any topic they picked! The results of these disputations, which were actually held, were then revised and edited for publication, and that is the form in which we have them today.

Now you may well be asking yourself: How does Ockham suppose the mind is able to form these universal concepts? After all, he's made it pretty hard for himself, since he won't even allow Henry of Harclay's minimal degree of realism.

Well, here it is. Ready? Ockham says (*Ordinatio*, dist. 2, q. 7, the objection in § (24), p. 194, and the reply in § (129), p. 212):

Nature does work mysteriously in the case of
universals.

Natura occulte operatur in universalibus.

In other words, "I don't know." It is a very mysterious process, but the mind obviously has the power to do it, since we do have such concepts.

This is a striking illustration of my claim at the beginning of this course that nominalists have difficulties over epistemology. Ockham in effect is here just recognizing those difficulties, and giving up.

Earlier, I said that one way to view the main differences between Aquinas, Scotus and Ockham is in terms of the question "Where do you want your great mystery?" For Aquinas, it was the esse of a thing; for Scotus it was individuality. For Ockham, it is universals — which for him means universal concepts. It is possible to regard Ockham's admission that "Nature does operate mysteriously in the case of universals" as just a sign of desperation, an indication of a major weakness in his philosophy. But it is equally possible to regard it as a heroic admission on Ockham's part that he does indeed have problems, and he doesn't know what more to say about them. Aquinas and Scotus had their gray, mysterious areas too; they were just in different places. And I don't know of any passage where either Aquinas or Scotus admits his difficulties quite so frankly as Ockham does.